

**HOMILY 12<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME 2021**  
**WHO IS THIS JESUS WITH POWER OVER AND FORCES OF NATURE? STILLING THE**  
**STORMS AND THE WAVES IN OUR LIVES**

*Mk 4.35-41 Job 38.1,8-11 2Cor 5.14-17 Rhyme Bible version "The Storm" (Mark 4)*

*And now it's up to 75 maximum at a time, for Mass, while continuing to provide a virtual link to our celebration of Eucharist on the parish website. It's also World Refugee Day today, as our thoughts, prayers and, hopefully, donations, go out to the literally millions of refugees currently in our afflicted and conflicted world.*

In recent times, it doesn't take much imagination to realize the power of the forces of nature. Locally, we only have to go back to the beginning of the dire year of 2020, with the terrible, frightening and destructive bushfires early in the year, followed by the plague of coronavirus, ongoing in the background, and this month's devastation of the wild storms in the Dandenongs and surrounding areas. The recovery process is underway now, for those who have lost homes, or been afflicted with massive damage and loss, and where power and water supply is still restricted. We can take so much for granted when we turn on the tap or flick a switch, until we are disrupted by forces beyond our control.

The fundamentalists might say it's all **God's Will**, but that's a cop-out, really, as, to my mind, God's Will is for the good of all of us in our fragile world, in which we find ourselves, through no fault of our own! Any suggestion of cause and effect as God's wrath and punishment coming down upon us for our transgressions is absurd and wrongheaded. Once again, I see God's Will is that we take responsibility for our decisions, that we use free will well and inform our consciences and act accordingly. Yet we have to accept it's not all within our control.

We just have to look at poor old Job, who has copped it from all angles, and is slowly starting to climb out of his black hole of anger and depression, after asking the very natural question of **'Why me? Life's just not fair!'** It's easy enough to understand his attitude, as he is said to have been a fundamentally good man, who has in fact done nothing particularly wrong, or worse than anyone else, as he sees it. Yet, he is a sort of example of **Murphy's Law** in the Old Testament, where anything that can go wrong will, and don't say it couldn't get any worse, because it probably could, or even definitely will. Not only does his wife desert him, his 10 children die, but his house and barns cave in after a wild storm, he loses his flocks in a tornado, and so is out of a job, bereft of everything.

Today we meet Job at a point where he is facing up to his grief, anxiety and trauma. He starts to realize that it is wrong to blame God, and that the challenge is to find oneself in the midst of the darkness and chaos, to see the light at the end of the tunnel (*as long as it's not an oncoming train!*). It's for us to realize and believe that while there is life, there is still hope for a better future, if we make the most of our opportunities. As he reflects, he finds God in the eye of the storm, but offering relief, hope and peace, if he believes and perseveres.

And he does find renewed enthusiasm for life and love, as things improve for him, with God's reassurance and his own faith in a power beyond himself. (Noting that it takes till Job 38 today, admittedly in short chapters, that *"The Lord answers Job"*, who does say half-way through, in Job 19, the famous prophetic line taken up by Handel, in **The Messiah**: *"I know that my Redeemer lives"*, as he wrestles with his demons in his darkness and depression.)

As time goes by, no-one wants to know Job, moving into isolation and loneliness, even before he breaks out in boils (perhaps a form of psoriasis or shingles), just to rub salt into his wounds, to increase his suffering and angst. The first suggestion from his so-called friends, is that it must be his own fault that God is punishing him so severely. In his sufferings he comes to loathe his life, his spirit is broken, and he just feels sorry for himself, as we all can do in the down times of our lives. Then, right at the end of the story, it all comes back to him, and he lives happily ever after, but not really!!! ***It's all a metaphor about the problem of evil, and why bad things can and continue to happen to good people. We still wrestle with the issue in our own lives and world.***

And so, in today's Gospel, following up on the inevitability of growth parables, both in the natural world, and in the coming Kingdom of God proclaimed by Jesus, Mark has him continuing his ministry of preaching and teaching, early on, now out in the boat with his closest friends, who start to lose faith in him, as they are tested by the storm and the threatening waves on the waters, while Jesus takes it easy, asleep in the boat, despite the fear and anxiety all around. His eventual response brings calm over the wind and the waves, and so the disciples, as they recognize his authority and power over chaos and evil, as symbolized by the wild waters surrounding them. It's a reminder of beginnings in Genesis, when there was darkness over the waters of chaos, and God's creative Spirit moves over the surface, with light, life and order evolving from the depths of disorder.

Who can remember the old hymn *Hail Queen of Heaven*, about '*The tempest-tossed Church*'? Brendan Byrne SJ suggests: "*The boat is a symbol of the Church; the sea – especially the sea out of control – is a symbol of all the forces that are hostile to the Church and seek to destroy it (and maybe the temptations we face personally as well). Yet, to fulfil its mission, and win people ('fish') for the Kingdom, the Church must go out on the sea. There are times in the history of the Church (and for you and me too, really) when its Lord seems to be absent or asleep – times when faith in the divine presence and power is put to the test. In such situations, the story told in this Gospel gives great hope and encouragement. At the same time, it takes us more deeply into the mystery of Christ, as, along with the disciples, we too ask: "Who is this... ?"*

So, here we are, all on the journey, striking stormy, scary and dark waters along the way, in all sorts of circumstances, seeking his presence and guidance, along with the support, understanding and encouragement of others, as we move across the metaphorical turbulent seas of life, which rise up to disturb and perturb us, seeking peace and tranquillity through his presence. The Kingdom is here and now, but not yet, still evolving and coming, despite our own limitations and failings.

*john hannon*

*Shortest Day – Winter Solstice*

*20<sup>th</sup> June 2021*