

Sometimes when baseball teams come off the All Star break – they have a hard time re-establishing their momentum.

Now certainly no teams we know and follow – but *some* teams take a week or two to get back in the groove of playing games every night – and winning more than they lose.

Having experienced somewhat of an All Star break last weekend --- with the feast of the Transfiguration interrupting our steady observance of Ordinary Time – we certainly don't want to lose our momentum of committing our minds, hearts, and souls – in following after Jesus as his disciples.

And so this Sunday we have a wonderful story that gets us right back into the thick of things – with two recurring themes of the problems followers of Jesus are likely to face: FEAR and LACK OF FOCUS.

First of all – the disciple as a whole – are just so slow to learn. . .

They had just witnessed an event that was so important in the life of Jesus – that it is one of the few miracles recorded in all four Gospels: the multiplication of the loaves and fish -- where from meager resources – Jesus feeds a crowd of five thousand people (the story we missed last week, as we dropped the 18th Sunday in Ordinary Time – to go to the mountaintop).

This was such a spectacular fete – that those on the other side of the Sea of Galilee are there to meet Jesus when he comes ashore – begging him that they might touch only the tassel of his cloak to be healed – that’s how quickly word spread that this Jesus was a powerful man.

And yet the apostles –who have been with him for a good year at this point in Matthew’s Gospel – are so unsettled by the wind and the rain tossing them about – they don’t even recognize Jesus because they are so fearful.

Yes, it would be strange that Jesus would walk to them on water – but, wasn't it just as strange that he fed 5,000 people – or cured a man with a withered hand – or a woman who had been bleeding for 12 years – or raising the daughter of an official of the synagogue from her death bed???

--- What's there to be afraid of?? Let's open our minds a bit, disciples!

But as we have considered before, FEAR is such a part of our human existence – it is hard to turn loose of it. . .

I think Jesuit Father James Martin has an interesting observation in his book: Jesus: A Pilgrimage, when he writes:

“Notice that the disciples encounter fear where they should be most comfortable – aboard their own boats in a body of water they knew so well.

Especially when God enters into our familiar surroundings, cozy places, or parts of our lives where everything seems settled – we may be particularly frightened.

Perhaps there is a sudden thaw in a frozen relationship. Maybe you fear this new challenge to your old ways, ‘what are you doing here, God?’ we may want to say. ‘Don’t make me let go of my resentments. I’m too settled.’

Sometimes, [Fr. Martin says] I don't think it is the storms in our lives we fear the most – as much as the calm after the storms. . .

But even in these places Jesus says, 'Do not be afraid.'" (Page 234)

Fear is one of those things that can keep us from following Jesus with all our minds and all our hearts. And Jesus doesn't come so much to take away all our fears – as he does to say that he will be with us in the midst of our fears.

So that's the disciples as a whole – being slow to learn. But then there is also the story of the unfocused Peter. . .

Who initially does so well when he steps out of the boat – but then pay attention to the details of the story:

“But when he saw how strong the wind was – he became frightened; and, beginning to sink, he cried out, ‘Lord, save me!’ And Jesus says: ‘O you of little faith, why did you doubt?’”

Having gotten over the fear of thinking he had seen a ghost, along with the other eleven – Peter gives right back into fear --- by taking his eyes off Jesus and paying more attention to the strong wind – rather than the strong hand of Jesus.

And how many times does that happened to us – we take our eyes off Jesus – and we give into our doubts and our fears – and everything goes to pot, to use polite language. . .

When will Peter ever learn – when will the disciples ever learn – when we will ever learn --- that we can trust Jesus and it is only when we place all our hope – not just some, but all our hope in him --- that we are able to achieve incredible things --- like walking on water!

And we stay focused on Jesus – by doing what Jesus himself does in the Gospel today prior to his little stroll on the waves: “he went up to the mountain by himself to pray.”

This mountain, like Mount Tabor of last week:
once again becomes the quiet place to rub elbows
with God – to get in touch with the divine life – so as
to do effective ministry in the name of the Lord.

That's what drove Elijah to the mountain – his
desire to encounter God --- and God was not in the
strong and heavy wind – read the hustle and bustle of
our lives – God was not in the earthquake or the fire –
read the everyday turmoils that zap our time and
energy throughout the day ---- but God was there ---
in a tiny whispering sound – that only can be heard by
creating places and times of silence in our lives.

It just so happens I came across another poem
this week that spoke to me in a profound way – and I
hope it speaks to you. This one is by wife and mother
and amateur poetess, Natalie Hoefer:

Cook, clean, mow, rake:

Chore upon chore upon my plate.

Rush to work and rush to meetings.

Time for quiet, ever fleeting.

Working late, home even later.

Pressure feeling ever greater.

Need a clone to follow through.

To do all these things I have to do. . .

“Stop. Be still. And know that I am God.”

Alarm clock blares, up late again.

To spin the plates that I must spin.

Hustle here and hustle there.

Not a moment left to spare.

Soccer practice, music lessons.

Baseball games, and tryout sessions.

Classroom Mom and Shopping Mom -- just a
few more things that I must. . .

“Stop. Be still. And know that I am God.”

So for just ten minutes I try. I stop. I am still.

--And I rediscover God.

(Be Still – as found in the *Criterion* 4 August 2017)

