

Timothy J. Grassi

19<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time (A) 2020

From the early 1940's, there comes the true story of a gypsy family who survived the Holocaust of World War II. The family were members of a traveling circus that toured throughout eastern Europe. In one of the family acts, a teenage daughter would jump from a high wire with no net below, and her father would catch her. The account goes that one day her father left the apartment early, leaving the daughter alone in the apartment. Later that morning, there was a knock on the door. When she opened it, she found a stranger who said he had a message from her father. The stranger told her the message was as follows: Nazi troops were coming into town and she needed to escape. But it was far too risky for the father to enter the town or the daughter to escape in the daylight hours. Their only hope was to escape at night. So the stranger told her that at 2 in the morning she was to walk out to the northwest corner of the apartment building. And right at 2am, she was to jump from the rooftop and her father would be below to catch her. Understandably, the daughter was confused. She didn't know the messenger. She didn't know whether the message he gave her was actually from her father. She wasn't even positive which corner of the apartment building was the northwest corner. Well, as the day went on the Nazis did in fact enter the town and take up positions. That night at 2am the daughter went to the rooftop. She looked down

and it was pure blackness. She whispered, "Father, are you there?" No answer. And then she jumped.....and her father caught her! Leaps of faith are normally less dramatic, but they are no less real. In order to act in good Faith, the young daughter had to trust. First, she had to trust that the stranger was really sent by her father. Second, she had to trust that the message was her father's message. Finally, she had to trust that she herself would leap from the correct corner of the rooftop, and that her father would be ready below. This is the kind of leap of Faith that Peter made. It is really an unusual miracle for Jesus, because He is usually responding to someone's needs: hunger, sickness, evil, spirit possession, storms on the sea. But in this case, Jesus walking on water is simply a manifestation of His divinity; proof that He is God. Seeing Him approaching them, the Apostles panicked and Jesus said: "Take courage, it is I, do not be afraid." "It is I" is an important part of this Gospel because it gives greater clarity about what this event meant. It could mean, "it's just me." But it is also in Greek the name that God gave Moses when Moses wanted to know God's name: "I am," or "I am who I am." So, in a sense, Jesus walking on the water is a summons to faith for the disciples. It is a way for them to approach reality leaving behind our old way of measuring things and seeing all according to this Person who calls to us. Jesus is saying to us what He said to His disciples, "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid." This is an invitation to find our security and confidence in Him. Peter wants to walk on the water as further proof

of the divinity of Jesus, but his fear and doubt cause him to sink. When Jesus says, “Come” come with your troubles, come in spite of your fears, come with your sins; I will rescue you. We have no reason to doubt. He means what He says. When Jesus commands us, “Come!” our life in Christ gives us the exciting privilege of living far beyond our human limitations. And notice that when Peter began to sink, whether Jesus stretched His arm a miraculous length to catch him, or Peter was closer to Jesus than he realized. The point is, no matter how much it seems that Jesus is testing our hearts of faith or stretching us, He is always near us, within arms length. His arm is never too short to save us. As we follow Him daily, we have to keep in mind that sometimes the Lord steps a few inches back so we can grow in strength and faith. He wants us to go the distance, not to sink in fear. The reality is that we are all a lot like Peter. Jesus has called us to be His followers in this 21<sup>st</sup> century world. Trying to follow Jesus today is almost like trying to walk on water. It’s next to impossible. But, Jesus believes we can do it; do we believe it? Like Peter, we must not make the fatal mistake of taking our eyes off Jesus. As Peter walked toward Jesus, he suddenly became alarmed at the high winds and the high waves. He began to focus on the impossibility of what he was doing. Sometimes we do the same and that is our fatal mistake – we focus on the impossibility of overcoming the high winds and high waves of being a Christian instead of focusing on Jesus and we begin to sink. But, like St. Peter, we must

continue to cry out “Lord save me!” In our frustration, we have to be like that teenage daughter who jumped precisely at 2AM and we will experience what Peter did. We will experience the hand of Jesus reaching out in love to us. We may not experience it instantly and miraculously, but if we keep calling we will indeed experience it. And we will say with St. Peter, “Truly, you are the Son of God.”