

FAITH AND BIG WAVES

I went to a family reunion some time ago, but I still remember it. There were aunts and uncles and cousins, not to mention my brother and sister, from as far away as Alaska and California. It was great fun as we reminisced and laughed together. And, as always seems to happen when I am around, there were all sorts of discussions of prayer and God and theology. My Aunt asked me, just as she was leaving, to explain Original Sin in the few seconds she could stay. Millions and billions of words have attempted to explain this, but I gave it a shot. My brother, a very intelligent man who has been away from the Church for a very long time, wanted to understand God. Where is He? What is He? How does He work? My sister wrestles with the implications of her strong evangelical faith. But it was me that made the mistake. We had finished dinner and I walked into the kitchen to get some dessert. I NEVER need dessert, but I WAS on vacation, so in I went. My brother was in the kitchen on the same mission, and we somehow got from brownies or cheesecake to a discussion of Infant Baptism. (This is NOT an easy jump of subjects!) My sister comes in (she knows she wants cheesecake) and wants to know what happens when one sins after having been "saved." How many times can one be "saved?" I never knew that getting a dessert could lead to such interesting discussions.

It seems to me that in St. Matthew's Gospel about Peter walking on water (14:22-33) deals with all three of these issues. To my Aunt and Uncle, Matthew is saying that God created an imperfect world. He created a world with sin in it. He created a world with pain and suffering. He created a world with REALLY BIG WAVES. I do not know why. We are never told why anywhere. It is high on my list of things to ask Jesus when I get to heaven. But the indisputable fact is that He DID.

To my brother, St. Matthew is saying that God is not limited by our intellect, regardless of how badly we want to understand him. God sends us out in boats, KNOWING the storm

is coming. God calls us o'er the water, even when WE "know" we can't walk on water. God calls us to step out IN FAITH against all reason. God calls us to step out in faith KNOWING that we will look down and begin to sink. That is how He created us!

To my sister, St. Matthew is saying that God never stops forgiving us. We were saved at our baptism. End of Story. Jesus ALWAYS, repeatedly, reaches out to get us safely to the boat. That too is part of His creation. It may be tomorrow that His helping hand will be there. It certainly will be in the next life. BUT IT WILL BE THERE!

St. Matthew's account of Peter walking on the water is not about storms and walking on water. It is about ALL OF US being challenged to take the risky steps in our journey of faith. We WILL take our eyes off Jesus and begin to sink. That is part of our humanity. And Jesus, walking beside us over the little and big waves of this life, will ALWAYS reach out his hand to help us to the safety of the boat.

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