

Homily St Bart's, 7th Sept. Season of Creation 1: - The Ocean

I. Our focus today in the first week of the Season of Creation is on the ocean. We know there are 7 seas, the 7 oceans of the world, including the South Pacific which is closest to us; but that's just a way of speaking for our convenience. There really is only one ocean encircling all the lands on our planet, with its tributaries, its reminders, in the land as well: the rivers and streams and lakes.

In our Gospel reading today, we find Jesus in Luke's Gospel on the Sea of Galilee. It's a freshwater lake, below sea level, the lowest freshwater lake in the world. And it's big: c. 53 km in circumference, 21 km long, and 13 km wide, and fed from underground springs and from the Jordan River. It's also capable of producing great storms. And much of Jesus' ministry is spent on the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

And here, according to Luke, Jesus' ministry begins with the calling of Peter and the first disciples, who are all fishermen. Unlike the other Gospels, Jesus' call is accompanied by a miracle, the miraculous catch of fish. The fishermen have laboured all night and caught nothing. But ironically it's a carpenter's son who enables them to catch a full net of fish, enough to provide food for many villagers on the shores of the sea.

Peter is overcome at first by awe at Jesus's power, his authority over the sea and its depths. And is reassured by Jesus and commissioned for his ministry, along with the other three: Andrew, James and John. It all happens on the sea.

II. But let's go back to the beginning. In the book of Genesis, in the great mythological drama of the first week of creation, God creates the seas on the third day and the sea creatures on the 5th day, all the fish of the ocean and the rivers. Not only does God create them, God also declares their intrinsic value and beauty and goodness.

God, in other words, is the one whose dynamic word both creates the seas and their inhabitants, and blesses them, declares them good: *And God saw that it was good*. Elsewhere in the Old Testament God takes pleasure in the sea and its creatures, including the great 'sea monsters', the large blue whales in whom God particularly delights.

But God also has authority over the waters, determining their boundaries and their limits. Water can be unpredictable and uncontrollable, as we know from floods and droughts. Indeed, sometimes the seas can signify chaos: the chaos brought by floods and sea storms and tidal waves. Even then God can bring order out of the chaos of the waters, restoring them to their own bounds, their own tranquility.

The sea also provides plentiful food. It's teaming waters give nourishment to both human and animal life and that's all part of God's provision for every living creature.

In our first reading from the Old Testament, Job after his troubles and afflictions, comes face-to-face with God - the God he's never actually cursed but has poured out over and over again his tale of woe. And God shows Job the awesome nature of his power, even over suffering, his power as Creator of the universe, a universe he knows intimately and relates to closely. *Have you entered into the springs of the sea or walked in the recesses of the deep?* he asks Job. Because God has.

III. We find the same close connection between God and the seas in Jesus' ministry. Jesus is always crossing the Sea of Galilee, usually (but not always) in a boat. He preaches from a boat on the sea and performs miracles there, as we've seen in today's Gospel reading. He's able to calm the waters, bringing peace and order when they are stirred up.

Indeed, at one point, when there's a storm on the Sea, he's fast asleep in the boat, his head on a cushion, while the disciples, experienced fishermen, panic. Jesus isn't threatened

by the waters, he's not afraid of them; he has authority over them as their creator. He loves the waves of the deep and can even walk on them.

IV. It's good for us today to focus on the ocean, the seas, the rivers. For us they provide relaxation and refreshment. They offer food and nourishment. And we have the chance today to give thanks for the goodness and beauty of this part of God's creation, this aspect of God's providential love and care.

But of course the story is not so simple. The seas are under threat from rising waters, from depletion of the resources, from the bleaching of beautiful corals, from poisons leaking in from human industry, from rubbish thrown carelessly into the sea.

Far from valuing and loving what God has given us, we have abused and misused the oceans so that they now in turn become a threat for us. Our focus challenges us to turn away from abuse to conservation and love and nurture.

Today we come to give thanks for the beauty and wealth of the seas and rivers and lakes. And we pray for an ever-deepening spirit of thankfulness that will enable us to see the face of God reflected in the clarity and purity of the waters, that will help us discern the footsteps of Jesus across the waves, that will lead to loving stewardship of the resources in the depths.

Because, after all, the seas also reflect and praise their Creator. They join in the cosmic hymn of praise. Like us, their final destiny is God's future kingdom and they are as much a part of that kingdom as we are. As our second reading from Colossians puts it: *With all wisdom and insight God has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up **all things** in him, things in heaven and things on earth.* And that includes the ocean and its depths.

Mthr Dorothy Lee