

**“Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation.”**

Homily by Most Reverend John T. Folda, Bishop of Fargo

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Carmelites Field Mass  
Wahpeton, ND

“Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation.” Dear friends, once again this year we come for this Pilgrimage of the Prairies to this beautiful place of prayer and peace. As the summer draws to its close, we are moved to reflect on the many ways God has blessed us, and as the harvest commences around our state, we are aware of the bounty of God’s grace in our own lives. Thank you for making this pilgrimage to Our Lady’s Shrine, and thank you to the Sisters of the Carmel of Mary, who so graciously welcome us every year to their home.

Today we find Peter and the other apostles in a boat, crossing the sea at night. The wind and waves were against them, and this must have been the worst fear of those men. For the people of Israel, a stormy sea represented all the cosmic powers opposed to God – chaos, danger, and death. Naturally they would have been uneasy and even afraid as they tried to get to shore. But in their moment of danger, they see Jesus, walking on the water. At first they are terrified and cry out in fear. But then Jesus speaks: “Take courage, it is I, do not be afraid.”

And then Peter does something remarkable. “If it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” And Jesus says, “Come.” Peter is one of my favorite characters in the Gospel. No matter where we find him, he is so human, sometimes strong and fearless, but at other times weak and foolish. Despite his special closeness to Jesus, it seems that he’s always getting into some kind of trouble. And now he steps out onto the water with his eyes on the Lord. He dared to believe in Jesus. Imagine his amazement, and imagine the amazement of those who watched all of this. But we know what happens next. As soon as Peter takes his eyes off of Jesus, and thinks more about the wind and the waves, his faith falters and he begins to sink. Only by crying out “Lord save me,” does Jesus take his hand and lift him up, and set him back in the boat. Jesus is with them, and all is peaceful.

You could say that we each have our own “boat,” and we’re making our way across the sea of this life. We’re often caught in the storms, wind, and waves of daily life, the things that are out of our control. We experience sickness, struggles with family and work, and even death. Our Church faces persecutions, the dangers of secularism and dissent, indifference and faltering faith. It can seem at times that our boat is tossed around, that we’re going to perish, and that Jesus is a thousand miles away.

But as individuals, and as the Church, we realize in faith that our Lord is always with us, especially in our crises. Notice that he got into the boat with the apostles. He is always there in our need, no matter what. He is the source of our strength and can lift us up when we seem to be sinking. He is our stillpoint in the midst of chaos, our calm in turmoil, our light in the darkness. Just as he spoke to Peter and the others, he says to us, “Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid.” He reminds us that he is there for us, even in the worst of times.

But it’s so easy to be like Peter. He stopped looking to Jesus and forgot the divine power that was holding him up. His faith became weak, and he began to sink. Sometimes we make that same mistake. We

stop looking at Jesus, and we pay more attention to the things that separate us from him, the dangers, the temptations, and the troubles of life. We become so preoccupied with the storms and the turmoil, or even the pleasures all around us that we take our eyes off the Lord who walked on the water and later came forth from the tomb. Dear friends, that's the moment when we need to examine our consciences. Perhaps our prayer has become less frequent. Maybe we've started giving into temptation, or perhaps we've become less charitable. Friends, we need to keep our eyes on the Lord.

It might seem like Peter failed as he sank into the water, but at least he had the good sense to cry out to the Lord: "Save me." Even though his faith grew weak in that moment, he turned back to Jesus, and Jesus caught him. He stayed afloat when he faced danger with faith. He realized that God was there to hold him up. Sometimes our faith is tested, just like Peter's was, but God allows this so our faith can grow stronger. Peter certainly grew from this occasion of weakness, and came to see, with one test after another, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and he is our salvation. Brothers and sisters, a saint isn't one who never fails, but one like Peter, who picks himself up again after failure and keeps going. This story of Peter should be comforting to all of us. Life is full of storms and trials, and if I rely on my own strength, I will perish. But, if I look to Jesus and allow him to take hold of me, I will live. We can thank Peter for teaching us to dare to believe.

Of course, there is one person who never took her eyes off the Lord, and that is our Blessed Mother Mary. This pilgrimage would not be complete if we failed to remember her example and her place in our lives. All her life, from her childhood to the Annunciation, from the stable of Bethlehem to the wedding at Cana, from the cross on Calvary to the empty tomb, Mary kept her eyes on Jesus. Her heart always belonged to him, and even in the darkest moments, she remained faithful. In two days, we will celebrate Mary's Assumption into heaven, the final reward of her faithfulness, and she reminds us that we too can dwell with God in heaven if we place our trust in Jesus. Even now, as we celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of her appearance at Fatima, Mary speaks to us, directing us to her Son, urging us to put all our faith in the One who conquered not only the sea but sin and death itself.