

- In just about a month's time, our nation will be honoring the 25th anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on our country that killed 2977 innocent victims.
- At the time of the attacks, I was living in Washington, DC, but I was spending a great deal of time in New York City for my work – so I felt a kinship with both cities.
- It's a day etched so indelibly in my mind for many reasons. I knew of people who died in the Pentagon and World Trade Center. Security check points were set up all over Washington, causing gridlock everywhere.
- Washington Reagan Airport, which I was using weekly back then, was shut down for a complete month, necessitating that I rework several trips. Life got very inconvenient.
- It was so surreal to be huddled around a TV with colleagues and to see the devastation caused by the plane that flew into the Pentagon, and then to look outside my office building in Washington to see the smoke from that crash rising up in the air.
- It was a dramatic day for America, a day that challenged people's faith. Just looking at the facts of what happened, it was easy to wonder how a good God could allow such evil to be perpetrated upon innocent people.
- Moreover, such attacks on American soil, carried out so efficiently and with such devastating results, was humbling to our American sense of invincibility.
- While some turned *away* from God in their doubts, many others turned *to* God. Attendance at churches around the country surged, especially in Washington, DC, and New York City, as many Americans turned to God for help, for consolation, and for answers.
- Furthermore, people in both Washington, DC, and New York got nicer, more polite, and more gentle in their dealings with one another – at least for a time. Many people reprioritized their lives after 9/11, learning to focus on the important things like family.
- In my own conversations with people in both Washington and New York, I learned many small stories of people who should have been in the World Trade Center or the Pentagon that day, but for all sorts of crazy reasons were late to work or had a change of plans.
- The simple fact of the matter is that, in His omnipotence, God so often doesn't stop the commission of evil, for He never impinges upon human freedom. Yet, in His omniscience, He often works around the evil or chooses to draw good from the evil men commit.
- But to see the good that God draws from evil, we must have eyes to see and ears to hear (cf. Mark 8:18). In other words, there's an element of our human will in our faith! We choose it.
- While faith, along with the virtues of hope and charity, is implanted within our souls at baptism, that seed of faith given to us at baptism will only grow if we choose to exercise it.
- You see, faith is not a feeling. Faith is a choice that we make. It's a decision to look at the world with the firm conviction that God actually knows what He's doing, even when we see so much evil going on around us.
- Faith is a confidence that *all things work for the good for those who love God* (Rom 8:28).
- This is why St. Paul says that *we walk by faith and not by sight* (2 Cor 5:7). For if we walk by sight alone, we'll never be able to see the silver linings of life's dark events.
- Our Gospel story today, which follows immediately upon last Sunday's story of the multiplication of the loaves and fish, presents us with a rather dramatic and frightening event in the lives of the apostles.

- After witnessing our Lord feed thousands of people with just 2 fish and 5 loaves of bread, He sends them out onto the Sea of Galilee in a boat to precede Him to the other side. While sailing a few miles from shore, a violent storm begins tossing their boat furiously.
- Terrified by the storm, the apostles are even more terrified when they see Jesus walking toward them on the sea. Yet, knowing their fears, Jesus calls the apostles to courage, to trust that He is in their midst. And of course, He calms the storm.
- Yet, while Jesus often reveals Himself in the difficult storms of our lives, He also wishes to make Himself known to us in the simplest of ways, summoning us to look upon Him with the eyes of faith in the subtle and quiet details of life.
- We get a sense of this in our first reading with the story of Elijah. In this story Elijah has been fleeing for his life from King Ahab and his evil wife, Jezebel, who are intent upon killing him because of his triumph over 450 prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel.
- Now that he has fled to Mt. Horeb, God invites Elijah to come out of his cave to see Him passing by. There's a driving storm strong enough to crush rocks, there's an earthquake, and a fire ravaging the landscape. Yet God didn't reveal Himself in any of these!
- But then Elijah hears *a tiny whispering sound*, and he knows that God is there. When something dramatic happens to us, like a job loss, an illness, or the death of a loved one, we have to decide whether we're going to trust God or not. Some of us do; some of us don't.
- Yet, it's in learning to exercise faith in the simple and mundane moments of life that we are prepared for exercising faith in these dramatic moments, when a crisis or emergency truly tests the limits of our faith in God's goodness.
- Exercising faith in God's presence in the quiet times and quotidian details of life conditions us to believe that He's still with us and looking after us when life's storms arise.
- Whenever we lack faith, the usual culprit is some form of pride. Last Sunday I referred to pride as the living heart of sin, because there's an element of pride in every sin we commit.
- When something bad happens to us, pride makes us believe that we didn't deserve it and that, somehow, God messed up. Pride makes us doubt God; it questions God's goodness and omnipotence in the face of life's storms.
- Yet when despite our doubts, we choose to believe that God is with us and will rescue us from sinking in the storm, it's then that God so often brings good out of our suffering.
- It's faith that inspires us to get out of the boat and walk toward Jesus in the midst of the storm. And it's all a choice: a choice often demanding courage from us, but it's our choice.
- My friends, what does God want from us when suffering arises in our lives? He wants us to have courage in the face of life's storms and difficulties.
- God wants us to trust that He is in the midst of our storms calling us to be courageous. And He wants us to get out of the boat, to tread the waves, and to keep our eyes on Him. What's more, God wants us to see Him, too, in the little, quiet, and insignificant details of life.
- Faith is a manner of seeing this world around us with eyes that can peer beyond the bare facts of life, that can look beyond life's storms, to see God's loving hands working for our good. In this way, faith is choosing to focus on the light, and not on the darkness.
- May we each make the choice every day to trust God with confident faith that He is always in charge, always working for our good, always calling us to Himself – most especially when life's storms blow up. May we never fear to get out of the boat and go to Him.