

We had a few discussions this week in our parish about vocation to ordained ministry. It was not that long ago for me and it reminded me about my own journey and those who did this journey with me. What struck me at the time is that all of us seminarians had our good reasons to seek ordination, wise and rational reasons, yet if we dug a little, underneath the surface, we all had also a silly story about what deeply captured our heart for this strange calling. One of my silly stories is that I used to watch a series of movies when I was a child about a parish priest in an Italian village in the fifties. I found those movies very funny because this priest always got mad: He was mad at his parishioners for not doing what he told them to do, he was mad at the city council for being on the other side of the aisle, he was mad at his bishop for being too accommodating. The good thing though is that, each time he got very upset at everybody, he would sit in his little church in front of its great crucifix and he would tell all his troubles to Jesus and Jesus, in a very soft and soothing voice, would tell him exactly what to do. This was the part I liked the best. I guess I already had a sense that life could be complicated, but maybe if I was a priest and had my little church, maybe I could talk to Jesus and Jesus, in his soft and soothing voice, would tell me exactly what to do. Now, as you can imagine, it does not happen to me everyday that, from the cross, Jesus talks to me.

It happened to me once, though.

A few years ago, I was having lunch with a few friends and some coworkers. Nobody paid attention but I found that the conversation was getting offending to immigrants and therefore to myself and so, as the priest in the movie, I felt very upset. Long story short, I did not say anything but I left the group and looking for comfort, I walked to a close by church, entered into the sanctuary, looked at the cross and said to Jesus something like: *Do you realize how horrible it is?* And that's when it happened. That's when I heard distinctly in my heart a soft deep voice - a voice that was yet not that soothing, because it asked me back: *Why do you tell me? Why do you tell me?* If you're so upset, why don't you go and tell *them*?

Today, as the disciples who are sinking in a terrible storm ask Jesus if he realizes how horrible it is, if he even cares about what's happening to them, Jesus responds sternly: "Why are you afraid?" - in a bad translation of the Greek *deiloi* which would be closer in English to a: *Why are you timid? Why are you intimidated?* Why don't you address the situation? Why are you waiting on me? And Jesus, to show them how very little intimidated he is, stands up on the sinking boat in the middle of a storm, yells at the hurling wind and at the raging sea.

In the midst of pain and danger, when life gets hard, when the world is scary, we speak to Jesus, or if you prefer, *we turn to God*. And this is what we are taught to do, right? In the Gospel, people keep flocking to Jesus: *Lord, let me see. Lord, let my little girl live. Lord, save my boy from the demon*. And Jesus heals, and Jesus delivers and Jesus raises people from the dead, and Jesus eventually helps the disciples in the storm. Yet today in return he also asks: *Why are you so timid?* The gentle rebuke I felt in that church made me understand that I could not make of my piety a refuge, hoping that God would deal with what I could not or did not want to deal with, and that I had the choice between remaining a "victim" or do something. Not only did I have the right to stand up for my own sake, but mostly I had to stand up for the sake of others: For those who are wronged and to tell those who do wrong to them.

Our piety can become a danger to us and a threat to others if we use it as a way to not confront the world when this world is a mess. When people are horrible to us, or horrible to one another, maybe we can just wait on the Lord to act. But if we want to be real disciples, we have to hear the Lord when he asks us in return: *Why are you intimidated?* Our Savior and our guide yells at the wind and at the sea but how often it is that we don't dare opening our mouths. We're not only afraid of our superiors, of the judge or of the police officer, how often it is that we're afraid of our parents, of our colleagues, even of our friends. But nothing changes if we avoid confrontation.

As a general rule, one of the things we do to avoid confrontation is that we use this thing called triangulation. If you have a mother and a sister, you know exactly what I am talking about: We say something to someone so he or she would tell for us the third person we don't dare to talk to. Well, we triangulate with one another but the thing is: we can triangulate with God too. We tell God instead of telling the person we really have to speak to. But Jesus wants us to find our own voice. To find our own authority. An authority that does not bring more chaos or destruction, an authority that does not break those more powerless than us, but an authority that brings the calm inside the storm, peace into a twisted situation. If we want peace, we have to make it happen. We have, as the disciples on that day, to move from intimidation to "great awe" - from earthly fear to heavenly fear. If we really want to fear, let's fear God, let's fear injustice. Let's fear not taking any risks.

I know that because of the news, a lot of us come today at church heart broken, and we have all the reasons to be. But this week I also felt really shocked when I read an article explaining how we can cope with bad news, like turning off TV, limiting social medias, going on a walk. Yes we may feel like drowning into a sea of terrible news and maybe we long for comfort, as I needed comfort on that day in that church. Yet I am not sure we are really the ones who need to be comforted, the ones who need to be able to cope, and maybe today if we'd look at the cross and ask Jesus if he cares about the situation at the border, maybe he would turn to us and respond: Why do you ask me? Why do you tell *me*? Why are you so timid? Why don't you go out and tell *them*? We're smart, educated, powerful people. If we don't like a policy, any policy, we can speak up, we can talk to our representatives. I actually heard that this week their phones have been ringing off the hook and that should give us hope because that's it. That's what Jesus tells us. *We need to have faith*. Not only faith in the Son of God, but faith that the world can change, that laws or people can be made better, when our God ordered the earth, and commands to the wind and the sea. You know, it's not getting into politics or being partisan or being a Jesus freak. I heard one day a man saying that he just wanted to belong to the church of "not being horrible to people". Maybe that's where we should start. Instead of having big ideals on how to govern the country or how to save our souls, maybe we can just strive for a world where we refuse horrible.

Back to my story, let me tell you that made me so upset on that day. One of my friends was feeling overwhelmed at work. They had just hired a new person to help her but as he was from England, it was taking weeks to get him a visa before he could start. And so somebody blurted out: “Why would they bother hiring somebody from England? Why so many complications? Don’t we have enough unemployed people in Northern Virginia?”. Everybody nodded and someone even added: “Is it just because they want someone with a fancy accent?”. You know, when I lived in my own country, it actually happened to me that a foreigner got a job I thought I was entitled to, and believe me I was not happy. But my experience coming to live in US made me think differently. I realized that people leave their country for many reasons, but mostly because they feel called to do it. God calls people from every places to go places. It starts in the Bible with Abraham and that’s what Jesus is doing in our Gospel today. In this raging sea, he is actually crossing the border to go to the land of the Gerasenes to cure a crazy man wandering in a cemetery. We often say that Jesus was good to foreigners. But he was not only good to foreigners. In the land of the Gerasenes, *he was the foreigner*. And so maybe we really need to pay attention. All those people at the Mexican border don’t come only for economic or political reasons, maybe deeper, by the will of God, they come, as Jesus did, to evangelize us and to heal us. People from South America certainly fill our churches.

So, I went back into the room and I told them. Yes, immigration is a complicated and a difficult issue and that's why we need wise and efficient policies to deal with it, in the meantime we should not forget that it is the will of God from the beginning to bring all kind of people together. And we had a hard but much needed and eye opening conversation. On that day, I could have remained silent and bitter but by speaking up I ended making better friends. Maybe if we have enough hope, enough faith, maybe we don’t have to sit with our broken hearts, maybe we can bring peace, inside of us and around us, maybe we can become better people, better Christians, better citizens, and become a better nation. It’s in the hands of God – but it’s in our own hands too. Amen.