

## NINETEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (YEAR A)

August 9, 2020

1 Kings 19:9a, 11–13a • Romans 9:1–5 • Matthew 14:22–33

### I.

I read a brief account of the life of a remarkable man most of us have never heard of:

John Hume (1937–2020), who died on Monday.

He was a Catholic politician in Northern Ireland, who helped to bring about peace in that troubled area.

For that work he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1998, together with David Trimble, the Protestant leader who was his partner in peace.

On receiving the award, John Hume said that,

“Too many lives have already been lost in Ireland in the pursuit of political goals. Bloodshed for political change prevents the only change that truly matters: in the human heart.”

David Trimble, Hume’s fellow architect of the Good Friday peace agreement, recounted what happened when they returned to their hotel following the Nobel Prize ceremony.

The hotel staff had assumed that Trimble and Hume would want to celebrate separately, each with his own group of supporters.

Trimble explained that,

“We said no, we’re going to relax and celebrate the achievement together with all our companions that had come with each of the parties there.”

John Hume’s courage in working for peace was deeply rooted in his Catholic faith.

Earlier in life he had been in the seminary, and left before ordination.

He got married, worked for a credit union, and then entered public service.

As the archbishop of Armagh (Northern Ireland) said,

“John put Catholic Social Teaching into practice—  
sometimes at great personal cost and risk—  
working ceaselessly for a process of reconciliation  
through which the dignity of every human person is recognized and upheld.”

## II.

This was a great man who, along the lines of today’s Gospel,  
stepped out of the boat, and, courageously,  
walked toward peace amid a storm of “Troubles” and violence.

Today’s Gospel narrates what is perhaps Jesus’ most vivid and recognizable  
miracle: walking on water.

We even have a phrase, based on the story,  
to describe a person held in high esteem:  
“He walks on water.”

One compelling lesson of this story is that without God, we sink—  
overwhelmed by the “storms” of life that surround us.

But with God, we have the power to live differently amid those storms.

Jesus not only walks on water;  
he swiftly and calmly walks across a stormy sea.

In the Bible, this is a theophany:  
a visible manifestation of God,  
who demonstrates his power over nature:

“It is I; do not be afraid.”

We see in the Gospel that Christ shares that power with St. Peter,  
when he says, “Come.”

But, significantly, Christ doesn’t force the issue.

In fact, it's Peter who initiates this sharing of divine power:

“Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.”

We can easily identify ourselves and our current circumstances with the stormy Sea of Galilee:  
the pandemic that continues, now month after month;  
anxiety about the opening of schools and the state of the economy;  
protests and civil unrest that have roiled Richmond and the country;  
and the mental and emotional exhaustion of handling all of this.

God has power over all of nature, but in today's Gospel,  
Christ doesn't calm the storm (as he does in another episode).

But Christ walks in the midst of it, in order to reach and reassure the apostles.

He gives them—and us—that same power to live amid the difficulty.

This is an important point:  
being Christian does not shield a person from life's difficulties;  
that is part of being human.

But the grace of God is a power to live differently.

Instead of being overwhelmed, a Christian can move forward.

Instead of falling in despair, a Christian can help others.

Instead of wondering or doubting, a Christian can act with purpose.

Grace does not remove our weakness;  
that, too, is part of our human condition.

Peter fails in today's Gospel—spectacularly.

But that is the occasion for another lesson:  
grace is strong enough to rescue us,  
even when we do falter and fail.

Peter, for all of his impetuosity and shortcomings, is a man of faith:  
“Lord, save me!”

The next word in the Gospel is pivotal:  
“Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and caught Peter.”

### III.

Today’s Gospel asks a question and provides an answer:  
How do we want to live?

Christ beckons those who seek to live differently,  
who want to leave the boat and walk toward him.

That summons resounds in the celebration of the Eucharist,  
which is the staple—the sustenance—of Catholic life.

If we want to live differently, the Eucharist is the answer.

In that regard, I would like to say, that, here at the Cathedral,  
we continue to follow all of the health and safety precautions  
for religious gatherings.

For those who decide they can come to Mass:  
we are open, we have room, and we would love to have you.

For those who decide that it is unsafe for them to return:  
please know of our prayers and concern for you.

Please participate via livestream, and pray with all your might,  
following all of the gestures and responses.

Join us on your knees,  
as we offer the great Sacrifice of Christ’s death and resurrection  
for the salvation of the world.

That is the grace that floods the world when Mass is offered.

That is the presence of Jesus Christ among us.

The power to live differently.



POWER OF THE KEYS