

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Now, I don't know this is a true story, but it's a pretty good one to make my point. So, I'm going to tell it. It's the story of a retired gentleman in California, and California being California, I kind of believe it because people in California are capable of pretty bizarre stuff.

Anyway, our retiree one day decided to tie helium balloons to his lawn chair. He wanted to take a ride. After he tied a few balloons to his chair it started to lift off the ground. So, he called his neighbors to hold the chair down. He tied more balloons—40, 60, 80 of them. With the neighbors still holding the chair down, he strapped himself in. Finally, he told them, "Let go!" He carried a sharp pointed stick to pop the balloons so that he would come gently back down. (Kids, please do not try this).

His friends let go and he began to soar—30, 40, 60 feet—over the house, beyond the trees, out of sight. About that time, at LAX, the air traffic controller received a report: "This is Captain Jones, U.S. AIR Flight 411. I'd like to report that I've just passed a man in a lawn chair at 3,000 feet."

Believe it or not, the man eventually came down safely. Reporters asked, "Why did you ever do such a thing?" He gave a great answer. He said, "You have to do something!" Some people are like that. Whether right or wrong, crazy or brilliant, there are times when they have to do something, or, at times, say something.

Simon Peter was like that. He missed many great opportunities to keep his mouth shut. But there were times when he just had to say something, even driving the Lord to exasperation when he told him, "Get away from me, you Satan!" He also missed several opportunities to be still. But again, that was not his nature. Sometimes he just had to do something. Remember, in the Garden of Gethsemane he cut off the ear of the high priest's servant, and, in today's Gospel text he jumps in the water and nearly drowns.

Remember last week the Gospel tells us how Jesus wanted to get away by himself to mourn the death of John the Baptist, but thousands followed him on foot and he spent the day healing their sick and comforting them, eventually telling the disciples to feed them, which they did with the fish and bread that he had blessed, and they all ate until they had their fill, with plenty left over.

So, now, he tells the disciples to get into the boat he had arrived in and precede him to the other side while he dismissed the crowd of people. As night falls Jesus heads up the mountain to finally mourn the death of John the Baptist and commune with his Father in prayer.

Night had fallen. The winds whipped up. The little boat is being tossed about like a cork, with waves washing over the sides. The disciples are scared to death. Then, they see something more frightening than the wind and the waves. It is a man walking toward them on the water.

“It is I,” said Jesus, “don’t be afraid!” Up pipes good, old, big-mouth Peter, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” Jesus complies. He says, “Come!”

The impetuous Peter jumps out of the boat and “began to walk on the water toward Jesus.” Can’t you imagine him saying, “Wow, I’m really doing it. I’m walking on water.” Then, the realization hits him. He looks around, feels the wind and the waves swirling all around him. He must have thought, “Oh my God! What am I doing. I must be nuts.” With that, he begins to sink. “Save me, Lord! Save me!” With that Jesus reaches out his hand and grabs Peter and, I suspect, rather unceremoniously dumps him in the boat, saying, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” As the winds die down, they all realize what Peter had earlier confessed, “Truly, you are the Son of God.”

Peter’s experience here speaks to me, just like that of the old guy in the lawn chair. Sometimes you just have to do something. I really love that about St. Peter. He wasn’t the kind of guy to just sit around and think about what was right and what was wrong. He didn’t just talk the talk. Peter acted on his convictions. Sometimes it got him into trouble. But at least he jumped into the water where the action was. Many who follow the Lord tend to be more cautious and never step out of the boat. Even James and John, the Sons of Thunder, were timid souls in comparison to St. Peter. But I think that’s what Jesus so admired in Peter that he established him as the Rock upon which he would build his Church. He knew that, even if he sometimes would get it wrong, Peter would at least do something. He had a sense of adventure. And that’s who Jesus wanted to lead his Church.

As we prepare to rebuild our parish according to the Lord’s only command to us, “Go, make disciples...baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,” I am asking every member to at least do something. It seems to me that God must get awfully frustrated with those of us who are content to sit and wait when there is a world out there that needs saving.

Did you notice that Peter only began to sink when he took his eyes off of Jesus?

I contend, My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ, that's what's happening to our Church. We've taken our eyes off of Jesus. That's why 16 parishes in Bucks, Delaware, and Montgomery Counties, as well as Philadelphia, were closed. People went their own way; they had other things to do on weekends; they wanted things they could buy with their money. The Church, and Christ, became unimportant to them—until they were told their churches were being closed. Then, you had the weeping, wailing, and gnashing of teeth at the Archbishop and the Archdiocese and anyone else they could think of to blame. But, the people took their eyes off of Jesus and the mission He gave us to fulfill—build up the Kingdom He established on earth. All of those parishes that were closed were half empty on Sunday morning and had trouble paying their bills. Kind of like us here. They sank! We're still here—for now.

It's time My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ, to focus on our faith rather than our fears; to cry out with St. Peter, "Lord, save us!" We are here because we believe with those disciples in the boat that Jesus is truly the Son of God. Therefore, we have to start acting and thinking like disciples. What exactly does that mean?

Well, this past week was a beautiful example of discipleship in our parish. Sixty-six children from 3 years of age through 4th grade showed up for our Vacation Bible School. They were not all from families that belong to our parish, but all were welcomed. Forty-five volunteers, from pre-teens to grandparents, who are members of our parish showed up and gave generously of their time and talents. That is discipleship! The joy in the children and in the volunteers was overwhelming on Thursday evening. That joy spilled into the families gathered there, both parishioner and non-parishioner alike. It is that kind of service, that kind of commitment, given joyfully, that will fill our Church to overflowing, Sunday after Sunday. as we celebrate Jesus Christ living among us.

This is the dream I have for our parish and I believe that this dream is from God. Please work with me toward a winning and wonderful future for our parish, I believe that Jesus will hold us up just as surely as He lifted Peter out of the swirling winds and waves of the sea.

In this parish we are already doing something great for God, but we can do better. Please, please, for the love of God, I am begging those of you just sitting there, waiting for the wind and the waves to drown us, do something. For God's sake, please do something, commit yourself, take on some ministry, some work, some sacrifice. Just do something!