

20 June 2021
St Chad's, Coseley

Job 38:1, 8-11; 2 Corinthians 5:14-17; Mark 4:35-41



In today's readings we have two different views of how God works – and at first sight they seem incompatible.

We have just heard the Gospel of the calming of the storm with Jesus's sharp words about the disciple's faithlessness. They echo the Lord's words to Job, when – at last – tired of the meandering words of Job's friends, God replies to Job's complaints with quite a ticking off:

'Shall a fault-finder argue with the Almighty?
He who argues with God, let him answer that question!'

'What exactly do you *understand*?' asks God, 'What do *you* have the power to do or to change?' And the implied admission is '... nothing!' In the gospel passage, Jesus asks, 'Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?' In both passages God is the Lord of the most unpredictable and potentially destructive cosmic and physical forces – symbolized by the sea. Only the awesome power of God's being and word can subdue the forces of the world He has created, and sustains.

But, there is *another force*, which can also move the world, one that is capable of transforming and renewing creatures. 'The *love of Christ* controls us' says St Paul in our second reading (2 Cor 5.14). It is a different power, transcendent and holy. The first acts from the *outside*, but *this* force acts from *within*. It is the force that is at work in Jesus's sacrifice and death; and works in human hearts and minds by grace and faith.

We see these two contrasting powers at work in Jesus himself. Jesus' confident trust in His heavenly Father is total and pure. That is why He could sleep during the storm, unafraid for His safety, completely secure in the arms of Him who had explained His power to Job; and on waking he calmed the storm in response not to his own fear, but in response to His disciples' fear. But when another and different storm arose, when Jesus felt fear and anguish, when His hour came and He felt the full burden of humanity's sins upon him, and the final assault of evil against him, in *that* hour Jesus did not doubt the *interior* spiritual power of grace and trust either. As Pope Benedict once said, in that hour, Jesus was (on the one hand) one with the Father, fully abandoned *to* him; and (on the other) since was one with sinners, He felt abandoned *by* him.

In terms of the *first* power over the powers of creation only Christ himself can be the full and clear mediator of almighty God. It is only Him whom winds and waves, and the diseases of men's bodies and spirits, will obey.

But of the *second* power, St Paul, in our second reading, says it is *this* power – the gift of grace and faith – that God invests in us, making us 'ambassadors, speaking on behalf of Christ, the Messiah, who makes His appeal through us.' This is a power that flows when we abandon ourselves to God's love and merciful goodness for us: the power to show Christ's solidarity with sinners, the freedom to plead with people to be reconciled to God, the joy of living in total trust of His will and loving kindness. It is what St Paul once called 'the word of the cross': it is, 'God's folly that is wiser than human wisdom', he says, 'God's weakness that is stronger than human strength' (1 Cor 1.25).

Some of the saints have shown us what it really means for us to be ambassadors of this power, people who have lived intensely and personally attuned to the power of God that changes other peoples' lives from within. A power to love other souls; a power to forgive and heal and reconcile; a power to support and guide others; a power to share suffering and pain. They were people who could identify with Paul's words, 'death is at work in us, but life is at work in you!' (2 Cor 4.12).

To experience this power at work within you doesn't mean losing your personality. Quite the opposite: to know what God wants, to do His will, to know where the path of your life is to found – this is our joy and fulfilment. God's will does not isolate us; it purifies us – even if it can sometimes be a difficult experience; but it leads us to ourselves. Therefore dear brothers and sisters, let God's *interior* power renew you and transform you to serve His will and to extend Christ's work in all the places, and among all the people, where you live and work.

Never does this power renew and transform us more than when we share in the Sacrament of the Eucharist – when we offer our selves up, and take Christ's body and blood into our bodies. In that moment God walks into your soul with a silent step. Never will that step turn out to be what you expect to happen, and yet His presence will *never* disappoint you. The more you respond to the gentle pressure of His presence within you, the greater will be your freedom and joy!