

***The Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ
(Corpus Christi)***

June 2, 2024

Year of the Most Holy Eucharist

Reflection #23

“When it was evening, his disciples went down to the sea, embarked in a boat, and went across the sea to Capernaum. It had already grown dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. The sea was stirred up because a strong wind was blowing. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming near the boat, and they began to be afraid. But he said to them, ‘It is I. Do not be afraid.’ They wanted to take him into the boat, but the boat immediately arrived at the shore to which they were heading.” (John 6:16-21)

As we continue our examination of the sixth chapter of Saint John’s Gospel, I would like to focus on the miraculous event of Jesus walking upon the water which occurred after the multiplication of the loaves and fish. Both Saint Matthew and Saint Mark record this event in their own writings (Mt 14:22-33, Mk 6:45-52). However, similar to other events recorded in the Gospels, this one event has different features and dialogue offered by each writer. One very important point is recorded by each writer in each version: the disciples were afraid.

To piece together the event, as explained by Saint John, one will begin to understand why the disciples were afraid. We first acknowledge the distance as recorded by Saint John. The disciples were three to four miles offshore in the boat. This indicates that they were in an area where sandbars, or other naturally occurring underwater phenomena, which would provide stable footing to walk upon would not be present. Secondly, unlike the reactions of the disciples recorded in both Saint Matthew and Saint Mark, in Saint John’s retelling, the disciples are not afraid because they assume they are seeing a ghost. In Saint John’s version, their fear comes from the fact that they KNOW who it is who is walking upon the water. Our English translation of Jesus’ words “It is I” does us no favors. A more literal translation would understand Jesus’ “It is I” to be translated into “I AM.” It is this statement of “I AM” which causes fear in the disciples. Jesus is identifying Himself with His Father by saying the Most Holy Name of His Father, the Holy Name of God (YHWH). This moment would be described by later Biblical scholars as a “Theophany.” A Theophany is a name given to the various appearances of God to man as they were recorded in the Old Testament. Lastly, Saint John recalls how His disciples are wanting to bring Him into the boat. Saint John is implying they are at peace and their faith has grown. They are willing to accept Him into their company.

By taking the time to examine this event, we are now able to move into the deeper meaning of what will happen next when Jesus begins His beautiful homily on the “Bread of Life.” You may wonder what it is that we have learned from this story as amazing as it must have been in the moment. Please, let us return to last weekend’s reflection. Moses spoke of a future prophet who would be similar to himself (Deuteronomy 18:15). Jesus will show that He is greater than even

what Moses spoke of. Similar to Moses, He has fed His people through the multiplication of the loaves and fish. Yet, with His use of the Holy Name of God as He walks upon the water, Jesus is saying that He is God, He is the Lord. He is not “just” a prophet or a king, but He is God. The same God of the Old Testament who provided for His people as they journeyed in the wilderness guided by the hand through His servants Moses and Aaron. By both miracles, multiplication of the food and walking upon the water, He has dominion over creation. Jesus has control over creation. It does what He desires. Therefore, when He proceeds to speak of how His flesh and blood are to become true food and drink, then just maybe, we and those who witnessed these two events, might just want to pay attention.