

Crossing Over

“Let us go across to the other side.” These words of Jesus as he and his disciples set out in a boat to cross the Sea of Galilee were the focus of Father Pat Zabrocki’s homily on Mark 4:35-41. It was a reasonable request, especially to experienced fishermen. Yet, when a storm arose and the wind nearly capsized the boat, they called out to the sleeping Jesus in panic: “...Do you not care that we are perishing?” Jesus, after reprimanding their lack of faith, calmed the sea with the words: “Peace! Be Still.” Father Pat observed that it was necessary for the disciples to experience the storm before they could cross the sea. He pointed out that we, too, encounter storms in our lives. As I reflected on this, I remembered the life of St. Clare of Assisi, the founder of our Order, whose feast is on August 11th.

After leaving her home on Palm Sunday night to join Francis and his brothers, Clare was taken by Francis to stay at a convent, San Paolo, until San Damiano was ready. When her family discovered that she was there, her uncle and several knights came with the intention of taking her home by force. However, she clung tenaciously to the altar, claiming sanctuary and uncovering her cropped hair. Unwilling to risk excommunication, they left without her.

Through the years at San Damiano, Clare constantly struggled to get papal approval for “the Privilege of Poverty,” as she called it. This expressed the form of life given to her and her sisters by St. Francis himself. The privilege was given and retracted as different bishops and popes came and went. Clare continued respectfully, but firmly, to seek papal approval for the form of life she and her sisters lived. On August 10th, 1253, the day before she died, Pope Innocent IV finally approved the Rule she had written. Only then did Clare receive what she had sought so persistently.

It was through such “storms” that Clare finally reached her life-long goal of union with Jesus; she drew her strength from him. Her source of strength was expressed in a letter to Agnes of Prague when she wrote: “Gaze upon him (Christ); consider him, contemplate him, so that you may imitate him.”

Each one of us has stories of struggles in our lives. Even small circumstances in our daily life can be stressful. We need to believe that Jesus hears our pleas. Though we think he is sleeping, he is very close to us. He wants us to ask for the help that we need. Through the storms we grow deeper in our relationship with Him. With Jesus’ help we will certainly reach “the other side”.

Poor Clares, as followers of St. Clare of Assisi, are aware, not only of the struggles in our own lives, but in the lives of those who call, write, e-mail, or personally ask our prayer. This is why we are here: **to pray with and for all of God’s people.**

Sister Maryalice Pierce, OSC