

Sermon for the Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost

'Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds.'

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Having fed the five thousand, our Lord commands His disciples to depart from Him. To go to the other side of the sea, while He goes *up on the mountain to pray.*

Last week, we heard how our Lord's feeding of the five thousand was not just about earthly bread and hunger, but about how our Lord, who is the true bread of life, for which we long, must be broken, that all might be fed by His Eucharist for a thousand generations. By this *body, broken and given for you.*

Now He sends away His disciples, that He may rise upon a mountain to pray.

When else have the disciples of our Lord departed from Him, that He may rise up upon a mountain?

This you know, for all the disciples, save John, and the Virgin Mary, forsook the Lord when He took up His cross to mount Golgotha, there *to make all things new.* That there He may pray *'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'* This is our God, who departs, that He may pray for our salvation, even as He sends us away to cross the sea. Even when we see Him not among us, in the little boat of our life, drifting upon the waves and tumult of this wasteland; do you not hear Him praying? Do you not know that forever, *unto the end of the age,* your Jesus is upon the mountain, upon the wood of endless ages, that cross, upon which God was killed; do you not hear Him praying at every moment, *'forgive them'?*

Some wonder how it is that a simple parish pastor can forgive sins, as we do at the beginning of every liturgy. I tell you, by the authority of Him Who sent me, I

tell you only the prayer said upon this mountain. I tell you only the prayer of the Lord. His everlasting prayer. *'Father, they know not what they do.'*

Indeed, we know not what we do, for we are fools. We bicker with one another about nonsense. Defend your bickering if you please, but the Lord listens not to the bickering; He says only prays *'they know not what they do.'*

We complain incessantly about the minutiae of our short lives, claiming injustice after injustice. Complain away, call for a greater justice, if you can imagine one, but the Crucified only has one prayer *'they know not what they do.'*

The murderer in a prison, hidden away from all of us, that we may consider ourselves civilized men, may forever claim that his victim 'had it coming'. Sinful he is. But upon the mountain prays our Lord, *'they know not what they do.'*

Who here knows what they do? Driven by mad passions, we burst into anger, we wallow in self-pity. We blame everyone for the failures in our own lives; we blame great powers for the failures in the lives of us all. We rest in cynicism. Hate what you see as hateful, grieve over what you see as grief stricken. *'Sin boldly'* as a one once said. In doing so, you may believe that you are righteous, or you may believe you are not. It matters not a bit. The Lord's prayer upon the mountain remains forever: *'they know not what they do.'*

We are driven by our mad passions, as a ship is driven by strong winds. And as a broken vessel, we are lost at sea, torn and tossed by the torrent of this broken life. Are you not afraid? Do you not fear, as St. Peter, who, even as we, knows not what the future holds? Whether glory, or destitution? His boat is thrown. His life, and that of all the disciples, is at risk; *beaten by the waves.*

Yet finally, St. Peter sees what seems to him to be a ghost; for though we worship the Lord, yet He seems far from us; His vision to us, but an apparition. And it asks but he walk upon the sea. That he leave the boat of this life, and enter into the chaos of the sea, the very sea that would devour him. Death is what he is asked to walk upon. For no man can walk upon the deep of the sea, and not die, by waters or by beasts. Tread upon death.

The same is asked of you, dear Christian, besieged by the anxieties of this life, by the worries of time, of age. It is the fear of death that assails you, for if you were to never die, you would not worry whether or not you did this or that right,

whether you had done greater or worse. It is the fear of death that causes such worry; for we know that the story of our earthly lives comes to an end, and as any novel comes to an end, the critic comes to review.

When death comes to you, and you stand before Him who *shall come again to judge both the living and the dead*, the Great Reviewer, make no justification for your life; have no smooth words to explain your actions as you sink into the sea of death. Cry out only what Peter has taught:

'Lord, save me.'

'And Jesus reached out his hand, and took hold of him.'

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Preached by Pastor Fields

Sermon Texts: Job 38:4-18; Romans 10:5-17; Matthew 14:22-33.