

19th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME Year A

A cold, cruelly blustery night revealed – with agonising slowness – that fifteen young men of the Mornington Football Club would never make it home from their football match at Mordialloc. As dawn broke and families began to mourn, a nation was to learn the full extent of one of the world’s worst sporting disasters.

The sinking of the yacht *Process* in catastrophically rough seas off Mount Eliza in 1892, with the loss of all on board – including three popular brothers, Hugh, Willie and Jim Caldwell, sons of the Presbyterian minister horrified Australia. “Such an accident has no parallel in our land’s history” reported the *Argus* newspaper. Yet somehow, for more than a century, this heartbreaking event slipped from Australia’s consciousness

But the story is a reminder of how stormy this particular sea that we know as Port Philip Bay can be. Storms are powerful forces of nature and there is only so much that human beings can do to survive them. When human skill and bravery are spent, we are at the mercy of the waves and in our peril we call out to the Lord to save us or we perish.

In today’s Gospel we hear of the storm that suddenly broke over the disciples on the Sea of Galilee. They are taken by surprise, by a sudden squall, quite a regular occurrence on this particular sea also and they are hard pressed to keep the boat and themselves afloat. When the Lord comes towards them during that dark and troubled hour of the night, they fear they are seeing a ghost. But the Lord assures them that it is he and Peter, anxious to reach him, comes to him across the water. This event, like so many others, deepens the disciples’ faith in Jesus that he is not just an ordinary man, but also the Son of God. This extraordinary event reveals to them that Jesus is an extraordinary person. They can put their trust in him even in the most worrying of circumstances. Peter, feeling the force of the waves, begins to sink as he makes his way towards the Lord, and the Lord reaches out his hand to steady him.

In days to come another storm will overcome these same men and it will bring Jesus to a cross on a hill outside Jerusalem. The disciples will be scattered,

frightened and fearful for their own lives, and Jesus will be taunted by people who will take delight in reminding him that he saved others. Can he not now save himself ?

Storms occur in every human life. Like storms at sea, they can be overwhelming events and we can find ourselves helpless to avoid them or to escape from their consequences. Terrible weather is bad enough but human violence, be it in family, in society or in international strife, is a force that we can feel powerless to survive, much less to overcome. In the middle of such storms, when anger is raging, when things are said and done that hurt us, we are in great danger of adding strength to the gale by the storm of anger that invades our own soul. In times like these we need brave people to emerge who will faithfully carry out the things that make for safety and sanity in life. Storms play themselves out at sea and they will also play themselves out in human relationships, as long as we do not add our own fury to the gale. Calm and quiet-natured people are needed in volatile situations – people who pray and call out to the Lord of the storm for assistance.

Prayer brings us the gift of wisdom and a way of responding well to those who are out of control. In personal life it is a gift of not responding angrily to the barbs that others may send our way. In public life it is the gift of diplomacy that seeks understanding with our enemies, and not their destruction. People of little faith that we are, we pray to the Lord of the storm for the salvation of our world.