

**Reflection on the Gospel-19th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A
(Matthew 14:22-33)**

-Veronica Lawson RSM

The church knows metaphorically what it means to be 'battered by the waves'. Over its two millennia history, there have been periods of discrimination and persecution against its members. Countless church members have died for their faith, while others have been denied the freedom to practice their religion. There have also been times when the church has fallen far short of its own ideals and has quite seriously betrayed the gospel values it seeks to embody and proclaim. It is presently 'battered' by huge even terrifying waves, largely of its own creating. Only God can bring order out of the chaos, and God works through the courageous hearts and hands of faith-filled disciples.

In today's gospel, Matthew tells of Jesus astride the waves like the God of Israel (Job 9:8). In Israel's mythology, the sea represents chaos. To walk on water is to have power and authority to bring order out of the chaos. Matthew presents Jesus as exercising the power of God over the potentially destructive chaos. Jesus makes his claim to divine power explicit in words that echo God's words from the burning bush: 'It is I' (literally 'I am'). He tells the frightened disciples to take heart and not to be afraid. Peter, leader of the group, continues to doubt. He asks for a sign and is then prepared to take a risk in order to come to Jesus on the water. He begins to falter when he takes his eyes off Jesus and focuses instead on the threatening wind. Jesus reaches out his hand to rescue Peter. In a lovely gesture, Jesus takes him by the hand and holds him firmly in his grip. Jesus names Peter's problem as one of limited faith.

Matthew weaves the story of Peter into an earlier story from Mark's gospel. We can only speculate on the reasons for this. Were Matthew's communities going through a hard time? Were they battered by the waves of conflicting loyalties as they found themselves excluded from Pharisaic Judaism? Was the pressure of separation from the synagogue too great for some, even for those in leadership? This is a telling story for anyone who exercises leadership at any level in the church. It is a reminder to us as disciples to keep our eyes firmly fixed on the source of hope in times of struggle and uncertainty.

Finally, this story invites us to consider the uncontrollable waves we are creating by our reluctance to address the causes of climate change. A recent *ABC Four Corners* program (07/07/14) on the development of renewable energy sources in the USA and specifically in California provided, for me, a contemporary image of a saving hand reaching out to those Earth communities that are in danger of being submerged.