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Difficult and dangerous times. Intolerant religious leaders disdain the "deviants." Prophetic voices are silenced as a threat to others. Hungry people holding what little they have. This describes the environment of today's Gospel — and ours?

The disciples knew Jesus as the prophet rejected by his own. They saw him lead thousands of hungry people to share a little bread and be satisfied. All of this happened just after the preacher closest to Jesus was senselessly martyred by a deranged ruler. Then Jesus slipped away to pray ([Matthew 13:54-14:33](#)).

No wonder the disciples feared they were about to die on turbulent waters! Matthew, Mark and John each narrate a version of the storm and Jesus calming the disciples, but Matthew is the only one to tell on Peter.

Peter is named 24 times in Matthew's Gospel. He was among the first disciples called ([Matthew 4:18](#)). Jesus visited his home and healed his mother-in-law ([8:14](#)). Peter assumed the role of speaker for the group ([17:24](#)). Beyond that, Peter stars in three stories that have the same plot: today's stormy sea account, his proclamation of faith in Jesus ([16:13-28](#)) and his response to Jesus' passion ([26:31-75](#)).

## **Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

[August 13, 2023](#)

1 Kings 19:9a, 11-13a

Psalm 85

Romans 9:1-5

Matthew 14:22-33

The scene of today's incident has the disciples boarding their boat just after Jesus had preached all day to a multitude. In that scene, when the disciples suggested that Jesus send people home to eat, he told them to offer their own meager provisions to feed the five thousand. Even more preposterous than that proposal was the crowd's sharing of bread and fish until they were satisfied. That's what the disciples had experienced before embarking.

Once on the water, they got caught in a storm. While the waves had their way with the boat and the disciples fought for their lives, Jesus walked toward them on the water. Because his appearance was the last thing they expected, they figured they were seeing a ghost — a sure sign that they were about to die! Then, as all God's messengers do, Jesus said, "Do not be afraid."

Peter, a sterling example of the dictum that anything worth doing is worth overdoing, decided to test the waters: "If it's really you, call me to join you out there!" Jesus replied, "Come."

Peter loved Jesus with a wild heart, mind and soul, plus a drenched body.

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What a test! "If it is you, let me walk on water!" Did Peter even consider what would happen if it had not been Jesus out there? Peter jumped overboard (in every sense) and started to do what Jesus did. For a quick minute it worked; then Peter let himself get overwhelmed. That sank him. But for Jesus, it would have been the end.

As he pulled Peter's head above the water, Jesus said, "O you of little faith!" How was that fair? Peter had risked his life to take a chance on Jesus! Wouldn't it have been nicer to say something like "Great try!"? He could have asked Peter what had happened. But no, Jesus just said, "O you of little faith."

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There's a subtle and costly dynamic in all of this. On the mountain Jesus had told his disciples to give everything for others; it worked and everyone ate. Then, when they were in mortal danger, only Peter took a crazy risk. Although he sank into doubt, his daring brought him into a new relationship with Jesus. Jesus had now truly saved him. At least this once, Peter had risked it all. He bet his life on Jesus — and in the midst of not getting it right, Jesus did more for him than anyone ever had before.

Matthew leads us to ask who understood Jesus better, the ones who did solemn homage (like the Magi who returned home) or the wild one Jesus rescued when his behavior looked like pure folly. Isn't Peter's risky expression of faith much greater than that of the boat-bound spectators who simply worshiped? Risk, failure and

redemption seem to be Peter's pattern. He repeated it when he proclaimed Jesus as Messiah and then told him how to do it. He did it again when, after swearing he would die for Jesus, he denied him and went off weeping.

Peter offers us a saintly example of extravagance. Fear of failure didn't stop him, he kept growing closer to Jesus who appreciated his passion rather than worrying about his weaknesses. Jesus didn't criticize the group who stayed in the boat. They gave him proper homage. But Peter loved Jesus with a wild heart, mind and soul, plus a drenched body. Peter's very doubts allowed him to go deeper. Maybe we should hear "you of little faith" as an invitation.

Peter shows us how to risk the depths. His example dares us, too, to do what Jesus did. Today's word of God is, "Come." It's the only remedy for our little faith.

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