

NINETEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (Year A)
8-9-2026 Homily

I. Introduction

A woman named Marian was married and the mother of eight children, including an infant son named Jacob. Marian was given a great gift from a close friend: the opportunity to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land during the Jubilee Year of 2000. She took Jacob with her, while her husband stayed home and cared for the other seven children. The pilgrimage included a boat trip across the Sea of Galilee, during which the boat stopped in the middle of the journey so the priest chaplain could read today's Gospel passage in which Jesus invited Peter to come to Him across the water. Marian whispered to her friend, "I don't think I could get out of a boat and step onto the waves!" She expected a light-hearted or joking response, but instead her friend simply said, in all seriousness, "You couldn't?" These words caught Marian by surprise, and she wasn't able to stop thinking about them during the rest of the pilgrimage, on the plane flight home, and as she settled back into the routine of life with her large family. As she later wrote, "I continued to be plagued by this nagging guilt-ridden realization that I couldn't respond to the call of Our Lord to get out of the boat. But having looked down into those waves [on the Sea of Galilee], I knew with one hundred percent certainty that I could not have lowered myself over the side and stepped out onto the water."

A few weeks later, when this same Gospel passage was proclaimed at Mass, it was as if Jesus Himself was speaking to Marian. As she explained, "Like an electric shock running through my soul, I suddenly rejoiced to be freed from that nagging feeling of guilt at not trusting in the Lord. In a single momentary realization I 'heard' His response, 'You *did* get out of the boat. You . . . got out when you walked down the aisle to the foot of the altar and vowed 'I do' [at your wedding, and again and again in your willingness to have a large family]. Keep your eyes on Me and walk without doubting. I will keep you afloat" (*Fidelity to God's Design: Humanae Vitae 50 Years Later*, p. 6). We are not literally expected to walk on water, as Peter attempted to do; instead, we "get out of the boat" by placing ourselves in Christ's hands and attempting to follow God's plan for our lives, whatever it may be.

II. Development

The most important factor or truth about any person's life is whether he or she recognizes and responds to the loving presence of God. That's why St. Paul, in today's 2nd Reading, expresses his anguish over the fact that most of his fellow Jews, despite being the Chosen People, did not acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah sent by God. This upset the apostle so much he was even willing to be accursed in their place, if possible, if only they might open their hearts to the one Whom God had sent and accept His plan of salvation. The prophet Elijah had earlier given an example of wisdom and faith, for he recognized the presence of the Divine in the tiny whispering sound outside the cave where he was sheltering, and after the apostles saw Jesus walking on the water, they exclaimed, "Truly, You are the Son of God!" The Lord does not hide Himself from those who seek Him with humility and sincerity, nor does He expect us to find our way to Heaven entirely on our own. He has a plan for each one of us—a plan that will lead us to true holiness, happiness, and peace—but He does expect us to do our best to answer His call, whatever it may be and wherever it may lead us.

III. Conclusion

A little-known but important religious trend in the United States over the last few decades involves the hundreds of Protestant ministers and pastors entering the Catholic Church, often with their families and sometimes even with some members of their congregations, quite often assisted by a Catholic lay apostolate or organization called the Coming Home Network. These devoted Christians, through their study of Scripture, Church history, and current events, became convinced that the Holy Spirit was calling them to take this radical step, and that they had no choice but to become Catholic in order to remain true and faithful to the Gospel. For many of them—especially women who were serving as pastors—this truly involved stepping “out of the boat,” as they would no longer be able to lead a church congregation, and often had no idea how they were going to support their spouses and children. They also risked alienation from, or even rejection by, their families and friends. Some of the same risks were also present for lay Protestants called by God to become Catholic; they too would tell us that answering God’s call leads to immense blessings, but can also involve great sacrifices.

Chances are you and I are not going to be called to make a similarly difficult or dramatic sacrifice any time soon, or change our lives in a radical way; instead, it’s entirely possible that, like Marian, many of us have already stepped “out of the boat” in our efforts to follow Jesus, perhaps without fully realizing it. For instance, there’s the husband or wife who lovingly cares for a spouse with a physical disability or Alzheimer’s or dementia, and does so without becoming bitter or fantasizing about what could have been; the worker who refuses to try to get ahead by taking ethical or moral shortcuts, even though everyone else seems to be doing so; the person who frequently runs errands for and looks in on an elderly, homebound neighbor, even though the person is often irritable and unappreciative; the husband who works long hours at a hard and unpleasant job in order to provide for his family; the wife who always puts the needs of her husband and children ahead of her own, usually without recognition or thanks; the parents who are always there to pick up the pieces when their teenagers or children make bad decisions and seemingly never learn from their mistakes; the grandparent who tries to offer some degree of religious education to his or her grandchildren, since the parents aren’t doing so; the young man struggling to overcome an addiction to pornography who chooses to trust in God’s mercy and who tries again and again to overcome his weakness, despite his many failures; the young woman who resists her boyfriend’s constant pressure to have sex, despite the risk that she’ll lose him if she keeps saying no; the widow or widower who won’t allow loneliness to turn into anger or bitterness; the parish volunteer who’s sometimes taken for granted because of his or her constant willingness and availability to serve; the devoted parishioners who do not use old age or poor health as an excuse to miss weekend Mass and their daily prayers; and all the other unsung heroes who do their best to carry their crosses each day, especially when it would be so easy and tempting to give up, to complain to God, or to feel sorry for themselves.

If you are in any of these, or similarly difficult and trying circumstances, please be assured that God *does* see and appreciate your sacrifices, that He *is* helping you carry your cross, and that He *will* one day richly reward your efforts to remain faithful. If, instead, your life has been very easy so far, be grateful—and be aware that God’s grace will be available when challenges sooner or later come. All of us, at one time or another and in one manner or another, are called to step “out of the boat” and into the loving embrace of our Savior—and our willingness to take this step assures that our journey to Heaven will be successful.