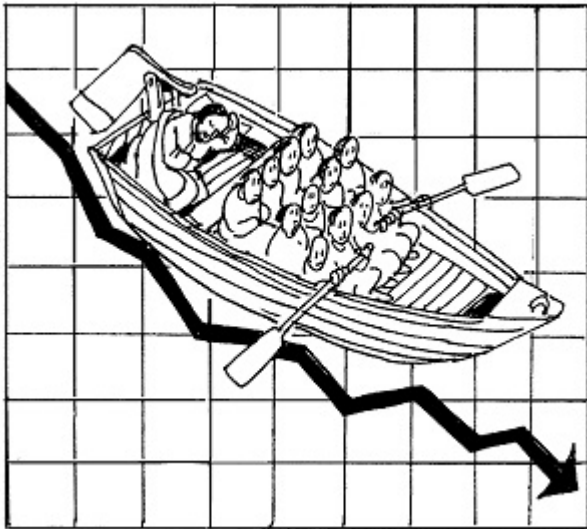


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by Pat Marrin

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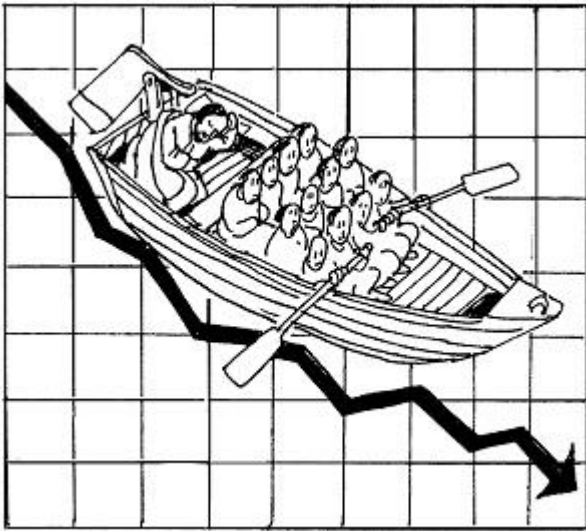
patrickjmarrin@gmail.com.

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“Why are you terrified, O you of little faith?” (Matt 8:25).

Amos 3:1-8; 4:11-12; Matt 8:23-27

As the church commemorates the first wave of persecution and martyrdom of Christians under Nero in Rome, the Scriptures remind us that God has always been with believers in crisis. Even when God seems absent, faith will bring us through any storm.

One detail in the dramatic story of the storm on the lake while Jesus sleeps in the boat may have come from 1 Kings 18, as Elijah taunts the priests of Baal when their god does not answer their shouts because perhaps “he is taking a nap and must be woken up.” Matthew has Jesus scolding his own disciples for panicking during the lake crossing: “O you of little faith!”

The prophet Elijah was famous for commanding powerful rainstorms filled with thunder and lightning. What Elijah could summon Jesus can calm. Each of the lake crossing stories in Matthew is a master class in faith. Jesus is rehearsing the Paschal Mystery with his disciples so that when they experience his death, they will trust that he has overcome death with new life. When he seems to be asleep in death, they will believe that his resurrection is decisive and that he is always with them through any storm or trial.

The Lectionary also introduces Amos, one of the early 8th century BCE prophets known for his fierce advocacy for justice. Amos was a shepherd and dresser of sycamores. His peasant origins and familiarity with the simple realities of farming and herding give his voice an edge over the professional prophets with their smooth-

talking support for the status quo. Amos preaches during a time of prosperity that masks underlying corruption and abuse of the poor.

Jesus' message of mercy is built on the demand for right relationship and justice. There will be no peace without justice. The disciples are schooled in both mercy and justice. They are not spared the risks and dangers of confronting injustice when they preach conversion. There will face storms but also trust that Jesus is always with them.

Our times require prophets who tell it like it is. When we want comfort and reassurance, God asks us first to face the storm and pray for an increase in faith. Faith arises out of crisis, challenge and even doubt. Biblical faith is rooted in the Exodus, when the People of God learned to keep going when there seemed no way forward. Suddenly a path will open up and God will be there. The church was born out of the dark night of loss and despair when Jesus was crucified and his disciples scattered in terror.

Only with first light and the faith of the women did Easter become clear. Jesus' last breath from the cross was the first breath of his Holy Spirit, filling them with new life and inspiring the mission to share the Good News. It is not Jesus who needs to be awakened, but we who need to trust and go forward.

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