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"During the fourth watch of the night, he came toward them, walking on the sea" (Matt 14:25).

Jer 28:1-17; Matt 14:22-36

Today's Gospel about Jesus walking on water in the dark before dawn to save his disciples during the storm has all the marks of a post-resurrection appearance story. Matthew's use of the lake crossings as Jesus' way of rehearsing his disciples to trust in his presence after his death is another way to describe the paschal mystery of St. Paul. Disciples learn to navigate the waters of death because Jesus has made the passage already. The story follows the miraculous feeding to link the resurrection to the Eucharist. Each time the church breaks the bread, it remembers the death of the Lord and receives the pledge of future glory, risen life.

The drama of Jesus' intervention on behalf of his frightened disciples is heightened by the hour. They have been fighting the storming all night, and it is in the fourth watch, the final watch, when he comes to them. He has seen them in prayer on the mountain, already reunited with God but alert to their needs.

Like other appearance stories, they first think Jesus is a ghost, and he chides them for their lack of faith. How long did it take for believers in the early church to trust that the boat would not sink, even when it faced real storms? Peter, the leader of the disciples, is given a cameo in the story. Typical of Peter, he braves stepping out of the boat to walk to Jesus but loses his courage and has to be rescued. All baptized disciples are invited to be water walkers.

This Gospel is worth sitting with in prayer, letting our imaginations rehearse our own response to the threats and feelings so vividly described. The early church came to faith through crises that taught them to pray and trust that Jesus was always with them. We, too, grow in faith and courage by having our faith tested. An occasional sleepless night of worry can remind us just how dependent we are on God alone. No other power can rescue us from existential freefall.

God is our faithful "companion," a word that means "one who shares bread with us." Whether in life or in death, our union with Jesus Christ is *viaticum*, a Latin name for the Eucharist that means "with you on the way."

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