20th OT-C Rock the Boat August 17, 2025

“I have not come to a establish peace but rather division.” I thought at his birth the multitude of the heavenly hosts said, “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.” Were the angels wrong? After all we pray for peace more than for mercy in every Mass. Of course, John the Baptist did say, “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire!” (Luke 3:16). It's all confusing to us, but not to today’s Pharisees.

The Pharisees were finally on top, and Jesus was rocking the boat. Like Jeremiah in a besieged city, Jesus’ message was causing unnecessary and unwelcome *waves*. It had gotten to the point that they needed to “actively resist” this itinerant preacher. They had to divert their attention from their construction of “bigger barns” to the silencing of this rebel rouser. With regards to this truth-teller they had to put their foot down! They saw a cross in Jesus’ future.

As we all know there is nothing more annoying than an unwelcome “truth-teller.” A newly impregnated Mary said as much in her Magnificat: “The Lord has scattered the proud in their conceit, cast down the mighty from their thrones, and sent the rich away empty.” But trust me, they did not go quietly! They go kicking and screaming right up to this very day. Reminiscent of ole Elijah’s display of throwing fire on the earth in judgement against the false prophets of the idolatrous, Jesus’ Truth rocks cul-de-sac ideologies where “truth” is what those I surround myself with collectively indoctrinate us into believing. A “convenient truth” that says, “we are right, plant your feet, and let the onus of change fall on *those people*.” Like the Pharisees, we want a smooth ride, no waves.

I remember white water rafting for the first time down in Tennessee. It came with a mandatory “safety training” we had to go through before we did it. “Don't fall out of the boat!” they said, “if you do fall out you can get caught up and trapped in a whirlpool spin of water and drown.” They went on to say, “But if you do fall out, don't plant your feet. Planted feet combined with the swift current can push you underwater and again you can drown.”

Guess who fell out of the boat and almost drowned! I have great empathy for the Pharisees who said don't rock the boat less it flips, and we drown.

Yet, Jesus rocks our boat. Jesus is God's WORD. Jesus is “The Way, the Truth, and the Life.” When Jesus is the one rocking our boat, however, it is because our boat has drifted into sin. Jesus as such is not the agent of division, **it is our opposition to the Way, the Truth, and the Life that rocks our boat**.

The worldly and powerful hear Jesus’ Gospel as a threat to their way of life, just as ole Simeon forecasted when Mary and Joe brought baby Jesus to the temple for the first time: “*This child will be the cause of the fall and rise of many... and a sign that is contradicted*.” John the Baptist called it out too, “*He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and* *fire!*”

But there's more. You see, Jesus is not rocking our boats from a distance. Jesus is in the boat with us right now and is personally invested in our salvific ride! This is why he says today, “*There is a baptism with which I must be baptized, and how great is my anguish until it is accomplished!*” Jesus is talking about his crucifixion.

As theologian Scott Spencer puts it, “Jesus is not some remote firebrand from an ivory-tower perch. He is fully, stressfully engaged with his people on earth within the fire.”

The last thing those white-water rafting guides taught at the safety briefing was this: “If you fall out of the boat don't plant your feet, rather curl up your knees and wait for your guide to throw a lifeline across your chest. Grab that rope and we will pull you to safety.” Sure enough, that's what they did for me. And this is what Jesus does for all of us at Calvary on the cross. A lifeline (salvation) has been thrown across our chest... will we grab it?

As disciples our whole mission is to grab Jesus’ lifeline, but it isn’t easy. We have to take up our cross and follow him.

Jesus is the Way, so we have to love like Jesus loves: without prejudice, grudges, or conditions. (Who is that person in your life you are refusing to forgive? Embrace the cross – forgive others.)

Jesus is the Truth, so we have to let go of the lie that we can plant our feet in the white water of sin and save ourselves. (How much do I count on my own strength, intelligence, or accumulation of stuff to secure my tomorrow while my eternity goes untended? Embrace the cross – serve others.)

Jesus is the Life, so we have to trust in him who throws the lifeline of salvation to us. (What are the “*tests”* I put Jesus through to prove himself to me? Embrace the cross – witness to others your faith in Jesus’ promises.)

If our ride is currently rocky, then it may be due to our boat drifting into sin as we are opposing Jesus with our choices and behavior. Get right with Jesus and his favor will rest upon us and we will know peace; he will give it to us.