

I wrote this lecture while on retreat this weekend. Inspired by what I heard and the time we spent in prayer, silence and discussion this is what I wrote.

As I write this, I am sitting at my desk and to my right I look out upon the Potomac River. The afternoon sun has just begun to pour into my room in its effort to overcome the overcast skies. At this point in Southern Maryland, the river is miles wider than it is in Washington. It is a vast expanse of water but not so that I can't see the distant shores of Virginia. I can view this serene scene from the safety of our quarters here on this overlooking hill. Yet what I gaze out upon is somewhat unnerving. My view is clear, seemingly encompassing everything without hindrance. It seems easy to know what is coming. Yet the bleakness of the waters dominion frightens my heart. I cannot tell how far it really is to the shore. And the water- the icy, bitter cold water- is a force I would not want to reckon with. I don't really know what to expect. What I think is how that stretch of water holds the unknown- my fears and yours, my struggles and yours. It's the path God calls us to go through while delivering His message to all those we seek and encounter.

Now we have only come here, just last evening, seeking God. We are hoping to encounter him and hear him in our hearts. We just want to grow into a deeper, more intimate relationship with Him, and figure out what we should do.

“I feel safe with you God. I could stay here for a long time.”

We have heard and been told though that following Jesus is not quite so safe or comfortable. What have we gotten ourselves into?

In all our discernment, the Lord is making us stronger, teaching us to be his apostles ever more. He brings us a joy we never knew. He knows the strengths and the weaknesses of all of us and He brings us together to share our experiences and struggles. That together we can help each other and grow in unity. Tonight apostles dine in this retreat house. They laugh and share stories, and become better acquainted because we will need each other's strength and companionship for what lies ahead.

“I am here Lord. I need to talk to you, to see you. There is so much I have learned yet so much I do not know or understand. I do not want to be afraid.”

I return to that expanse of water. I think I could stare out upon it for a good while. It is now nightfall and that eerie unknown the river is becomes a black abyss with no end in sight. I think to myself how I would not want to go out there. But yet we all know we will have to.

In all our discernment with the Lord and with each other, we are indeed preparing to venture out upon that vast expanse of water. We will be going into the unknown for His sake. We are to bring his message to everyone- and on that path we will face our fears, experience discomfort, and seemingly unexplainable suffering. The Lord will always come with us though. I

think we will find that our hearts growing love for Jesus allows us to face such things. It helps us to keep moving, and to understand why we cannot just stay in the comforts of this house.

“Lord I need you. What do you want from me Lord?”

At this point in our lives, the Lord has reached out to us and we have responded. Words such as discernment and vocation bounce around in our thoughts or will be. Some of us have discerned a calling already and are living it or soon will be. We don't have to know for sure where God has called us. There is no pressure really; we just have to be open to God. We just need to come to know Him. It is important to remember to seek God first, and to grow that personal relationship and live it because it will bear its own fruit. If we seek God first, our lives will be guided by Him into its rightful places and our vocation- our apostolic calling- will rightfully come.

“Lord, I will come to you. Help me to trust you.”

This morning portions of the river have become frozen. There is no one out there in sight, yet I do imagine that night long ago when the disciples were out on the water by themselves. They were being rocked by the waves, miles from the shoreline. Jesus was still on land but then he came walking on the water towards them. The disciples were afraid at first but Jesus relieved them of fear saying “Take courage; it is I; do not be afraid” (Mt 15:27). And Peter begins to walk out on the water towards Jesus. In the midst of the winds though, and recognizing the peril, Peter becomes fearful and begins to sink. He calls upon Jesus: “Lord, save me” (Mt 15:30). And Jesus reaches out his hand to catch him.

Such a scene reveals the trust Peter had in the Lord: A trust that enabled him to come to Jesus, no matter what was between them. Though Peter's trust faltered, Jesus was still there. Peter's trust in the Lord here is something to imitate. When Peter trusted the Lord it overcame fear- the fear of death, the fear of the unknown- and led him towards Jesus. Even dangers were present on the way to Jesus yet Jesus protected his beloved apostle from them. This trust that comes from developing that intimate relationship with God lessens fear, and magnifies the glory of the Lord.

We understand in some way why we must go; His love propels us. We will not stay in this retreat house or any house for the rest of our days, seeking comfort and building only the best life for our self. Rather we will be going for and with Jesus out into the world to places we never expected and situations unthinkable. We will be going with others. But it will take a courage that only comes from knowing God. A courage that will make us pack our bags, walk out the door, and venture out to the place we didn't think we'd go.

And while we pack and prepare to leave, we trust and we think of the Lord who says “For I know well the plans I have in mind for you ... plans for your welfare, not for woe! plans to give you a future full of hope” (Jeremiah 29:11).

