

IMAGES OF THE CHURCH I: THE “BARQUE OF PETER”

Admittedly, my experience with vessels on the open water is a mixed bag. I have enjoyed the Boundary Waters Canoe Area, though winds can make paddling quite a chore; I've misread maps (1985), searching for non-existent portages! Or, there's the glass-bottom boat tour I took in the Florida Keys (1991), immediately after consuming a large pancake breakfast. **Not** my **brightest** idea, and I'm not sure if I have eaten pancakes since! As the guide explained to us passengers the **symptoms** of seasickness on choppy waters, I began acquiring them in real time. It wasn't pretty, leading to my hesitancy to embark again. Conversely, I did serve as a **chaplain** aboard three wonderful cruises and largely was spared a repeat. On a cruise to **Antarctica**, the **power** of the sea at **50° south latitude** was amazing, with swells I had never imagined possible, until the waters finally calmed near the Antarctic peninsula. How did Shackleton do it?

It is easy to forget just how daring the explorers were, setting out into the great unknown as did Christopher Columbus. For centuries, sailors dreaded heading south of the western coast of Africa, (today's Guinea) because they were by no means sure that the ships could make the return trip if they drifted too far south. Only when I visited Galilee in 1988 and saw the restoration work on a 1st century A.D. fishing boat did I fully appreciate the Scriptural accounts of Jesus calming the waters or St. Peter **sinking** in doubt while trying to walk out to Jesus on the water. In 1986, two fishermen brothers spotted the outline of boat in the clay after a drought— it was an archeological game changer. The **27-foot-long** fishing vessel dates from the **1st century** and provides a stunning visual to what life was like for the apostles, tossed about on the stormy seas of Galilee. The first followers of Jesus were rural people, many of whom were dependent upon life on the water for their livelihood.

Today begins a **series of columns** dedicated to various **images of the Catholic Church**. Of the many descriptive phrases that highlight various aspects of the Church, the **“Barque of Peter”** is a most intriguing metaphor. Let's be blunt— our Holy Father has a tough job. He is steering a **very** large ship, trying to guide the ship of the Church safely to port. To “navigate” comes from the Latin roots *navis* ‘ship’ + *agere* ‘drive’. In the time of Jesus, exploration was not the goal— catching dinner was! And it was tricky because the relatively small (13x8 miles) Sea of Galilee packed a powerful punch. About the size of Lake Vermillion in northern Minnesota, its unusual topography and competing air masses made the stormy seas a constant threat to the fishermen. The water is 680 feet **below** sea level, but on the east side, the hills reach a height of 200 feet. This causes major **pressure changes**, resulting in stormy seas.

Fully cognizant of the tempestuous nature of the sea, the Fathers of the Church seized upon the natural **symbolism of a ship** in describing the travails of the early Church. In particular, Tertullian sees the ship in the storm as a figure or type of the **persecuted** Church. In his treatise on Baptism (*De Baptismo*), **Tertullian** establishes a connection between the Church and Noah, noting “the Church is the type of the ark.” If in the first shipwreck of faith salvation came by means of the wood of the Ark, so in the second it came through the wood of the Cross. He writes that a small ship (*navicula*) “presented a type of the Church, because on the sea, which means this present world, it is being tossed about by the waves, which means persecutions and temptations...” It was Jesus who calmed the seas with the Lord, “awakened by the prayers of the saints to calm the world and restore tranquility to his own,” leading it calmly to port.

Subsequent authors picked up on this theme saying that Jesus frees the church from the **shipwreck of persecution**, guiding it to the coast and leading it to the calm of the port. Taking a different perspective, St. Justin Martyr just as strongly noted that the **vessel cannot sink** because its salvation comes from the “mast” of Christ's Cross. The early 3rd century writer **Hippolytus** was even more specific: the mast is the Cross, the two testaments are the rudders, and the white sail is the Holy Spirit. Other authors insisted that the image referred more to the idea that this was the **ship of Peter**. Here, believers were on a sea journey, and the entire church is likened to a **large ship** which gathers all who are seeking the Kingdom. God is the owner of the vessel, while the pilot is the bishop. Perhaps that makes me “Officer of the Watch”— I'll take the early morning watch (0400-0800) while you, the faithful laity are the **passengers**. Anchors away!

One of the most endearing features in our Cathedral that is too often overlooked is the **decorative waves** that

occupy the space **directly beneath** the Stations of the Cross. They are **carved waves**, symbolic of the stormy seas that surround us seemingly from all sides. We enter into the nave of the Church (same root words) to find safety and spiritual sustenance. I have gazed upon those waves many times and find them reassuring. When you feel overwhelmed, know that you are **not alone**. Others have felt it and have persevered by God's grace. Be at peace—Jesus is at the helm.



- Franciscan Sisters in **Warsaw, Poland** are caring for a newborn, left in their **“Window of Life”**— a box specifically installed in the convent wall for parents who feel they cannot care for their newborn for whatever reason. While it is surely a novel approach to a pro-life ministry, it has been **utilized 18 times** since it began in 2012.
- First it was Hagia Sophia. Now the 700-year-old **Cora Church** with its **exquisite Byzantine mosaics** has been turned into a mosque. The mosaics were restored in the 1950's through the Byzantine Institute of America. The current church structure traces its history on the site to a 4th century monastery of the Holy Savior. President Erdoğan seems intent upon removing all doubt as to his intentions to do all in his power to shore up political support.
- These days, the television news is 100% politics. It's a shame that the media have largely ignored the **devastation** that parts of **Iowa** suffered from a 40-mile-wide **derecho** (100+mph winds). Cedar Rapids, the state's second largest city (pop.130,000), saw the destruction of 1000 homes and damage to 4000 others. It is part of the Dubuque Archdiocese, out of which the Diocese of St. Paul was carved in 1851. The Twins' Class A minor league team plays in Cedar Rapids.
- 'Tis the (political) season...If you notice activists outside the Church, according to city ordinance, if you are **not being impeded** from entering church, they may **assemble** on a public sidewalk and offer literature. But if you are being impeded, that's a different story. Share any concerns with our staff and **do not feel compelled** to engage in any discussion or take literature.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector