

## 19A

*There is this story about a man who, while out rock climbing, lost his footing and found himself desperately holding on to a protruding branch. If the branch snapped that was it, so he cried out to God for help. To his amazement God answered and said: 'Do you believe in me?' 'I do, I do,' replied the man 'without a shadow of doubt.' But God said, 'do you really, really believe in me', to which the desperate man replied 'yes, yes there is nothing more certain'. 'Ok,' God said, 'let go.' To which the man screamed: 'you can't be serious - is there anyone else up there.'*

As a result of Peter's impetuosity, Jesus invites Him to step on to the turbulent waters. He was doing fine until he took his eyes off Jesus and let fear get the better of him.

People can be plagued by all sorts of fears whether real or imaginary. They say that the words 'do not be afraid' occur 365 times in the bible, once for every day of the year. Medics tell us that anxiety and stress lowers our immune system so we become more prone to bodily diseases. It also inhibits us from loving people with any real intensity. A Moorish proverb puts it like this: 'he who fears someone or situation gives it power over him'.

We're not talking here about doing reckless things. To 'err on the side of caution' will prevent us from behaving foolishly. 'Fools rush in where angels fear to tread'.

But there is a more insidious fear which means we lack the nerve to really take charge of our own lives and be our own person. Unwittingly, we may let other people move in and take control of us. I've just been reading this week that people who are victims of modern slavery may not be fully aware that they

are being controlled, and that's the problem. The same could inadvertently be happening to us in our relationships. We're always looking over our shoulder to see what others think of us. We daren't do things differently. We're scared of stepping out of line – scared we won't get the nod of approval.

As in the case of Peter, Jesus will invite us to step out from certain controlled zones to prove that we believe in Him. Faith in Jesus should give us courage to face things which we feel intimidated by. But we must keep our eyes fixed on Him or else we might end up in difficulty. Jesus said to Peter when he began to sink and he says the same to us: 'man or woman of little faith, why did you doubt'. But even in our anxious moments he doesn't desert us but stretches out his hand to save us. But do we reach out a grab his hand or let the situation get the better of us and 'go under'.

Jesus came to save us from anything which obstructs our growth as persons. Fear is one of those things. The Evil One aims to keep us restricted and controlled so that we never grow into the person which God wants us to be. Conversely letting ourselves be controlled by God is the pathway to real freedom.