

HOMILY – Father Jim Carini
August 7, 2011
St. Matthew Church, Tolland, CT

"Take courage, it is I, do not be afraid"

This gospel passage is a good one to use in prayer. I may have spoken to you before about the type of prayer that one can enter into with such a gospel scene, but it bears repeating. So I want to make this homily a brief lesson in the prayer of imagination.

I am prompted to do this by the example of a very important saint whose feast day we celebrated this past Thursday, St. John Vianney. He is the patron saint of parish priests so many of us preparing for the priest-hood read a great deal about him.

He was born near Lyons, France, in 1786. While studying for the priesthood he had a difficult time with the academics and almost didn't get ordained. However, his piety and great devotion convinced his bishop and teachers that he might make a good priest. He was assigned to a parish in Ars, France and remained there his whole life, dying in 1859. He is known as the "Cure de Ars."

He spent a great deal of time caring for the souls of his people. He became widely known as wonderful confessor and spent around 16 hours a day hearing confessions. He knew that his people were hungry for a deeper life with the Lord and so he taught them simple lessons about prayer and the sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist.

However, some of his people misjudged his simplicity, and knowing of his struggles with academics, thought him a simpleton. So he had a problem in his parish. Many people would leave the church during his homilies, thinking that he didn't have much to offer them and then they would come back in to receive communion. St. John Vianney didn't know what he could do to change this, so he prayed to the Blessed Virgin to help him. She offered him a solution which he tried one Sunday. At the beginning of the Mass he announced that he was going to preach on the 7th Commandment that Sunday, "*Thou shalt not steal.*" So he told them that if anyone had a problem with this commandment and was a thief he wanted to forewarn them and they probably should leave the church while he preached. Nobody dared leave.

He also dealt with another problem in his parish in an equally shrewd way. When a person left church as soon as they received communion he felt that this was irreverent. He believed that Jesus was still present in the host in their mouths as they walked down the road, so he would send an altar server to walk along with them carrying a candle and ringing a bell to reverence the Eucharist. Now, I thought we could try that here in our parish, but we would have to have a virtual army of altar servers, not to mention all the candles and bells that would be needed.

Anyway, on to our brief lesson in prayer. With a prayer of imagination, you need to put yourself into the gospel scene and experience the emotions of that moment. So, I want you to think of a problem that seems to be overwhelming you at this time. Maybe you are dealing with an illness, or the illness of a loved one; perhaps you are having financial difficulties or worrying about the status of your investments (who isn't?); you might be struggling with a relationship, or agonizing about one of your children. Whatever it is, get into that boat with your problem and feel the waves tossing you about. Get in touch with your emotions. Visualize Jesus coming toward you on the water and experience the fear in your life as you think him only a ghost to frighten you. Then, as Peter, you recognize the Lord and Jesus calls to you to come to him on the water. You get out of the boat and you start walking on the water, but you become terrified of the storm surrounding you and you start to sink. Then, as you are about to go under, Jesus reaches out to you and with a strong hand grasps on to you and lifts you up and saves you.

I guarantee you that if you take your problem and put yourself into such a gospel scene, and there are many others as well, you will find the Lord's power and strength to help you. You may not see the problem go away, but you will approach it differently and it will not overwhelm you with the Lord at your side. Try it and let me know what happens.