

In illo tempore . . .

In the old days every Gospel episode read at the Latin Mass was preceded by the words “In illo tempore”, meaning “At that time”. For example, “At that time Jesus said to Peter, Follow me . . .”; or “At that time there was a wedding feast at Cana in Galilee . . .”; or “At that time Jesus went across the Sea and a large crowd followed him, and he said to Philip, Where can we buy enough food for them to eat?” And so on. Now we may think those opening words “In illo tempore” or “At that time” refer us *back to the first century A.D.* in which such Gospel episodes occurred historically – and of course they do. But according to the late Dominican scholar Gerald Vann, those opening words have also a more mystical quality. They refer not simply to “that time” back then but to “*that time*”, *that eternal Present* (beyond the grip of everyday time) *in which the wonder-working Christ now lives and remains available to us, no matter what century we live in.*

Indeed when the great Monsignor Ronald Knox published his English translation of the Sunday Gospels he changed that opening phrase “In illo tempore” to read not “At that time” but “At *this* time” to stress *the immediacy of each Gospel’s relevance to us*. In other words, he wanted to make it clear that the Gospel episode issuing from the lips of the celebrant is not to be received as a mere record or remembrance of a miracle that happened *two thousand years ago* but as a miracle about to happen *right now* among us.

Does the Gospel reading tell of the Widow of Nain and of how Christ stops a funeral procession to raise her dead son to life? The Church today is the Widow of Nain and we, the congregation, in one way or another are her moribund if not dead children whom Christ will touch eucharistically and bring back to life in every sense of the word. Are you ready for that?

Does the Gospel tell of terrified disciples caught in a Perfect Storm - tossed upon a night sea, their boat capsizing - when out of the darkness Jesus appears walking upon the water, impervious to the storm, saying, “It is I; don’t be afraid!”? We, the Church today, are those disciples, each in our own way tossed about by the wind and waves of change, possessed of a sinking feeling, wondering whether we’ll ever find peace, joy, a safe haven. But like the disciples, we, too, (if we have the heart to see) will behold the unsinkable Christ coming to us eucharistically across the waves, whispering to each of us: “Don’t be afraid; it is I; take me on board and you will experience a great calm.”

Does the Sunday Gospel tell of a hungry crowd of people out of whose limited resources Jesus produces a banquet? We, today, are that crowd of people. We have followed Jesus into this remote place. Though we live in a society of abundance, we’re hungry for more than what sports or stocks or even our secular careers can offer. And so Christ will take the limited resources we bring and eucharistically magnify them in such a way that we, too, shall have a taste of that “in illo tempore”, that eternal Present, that quality time in which he stands. And that’s not all. We shall leave here transformed ourselves (like those five loaves and two fishes) into persons capable of relieving the spiritual hunger of our families and community - and then some!