

Sunday 9th August 2026 Patronal HC Service for St Oswald
Oswaldkirk

“Oswald set up the sign of the holy cross and, kneeling down, prayed God to send his heavenly aid to those who trusted in him in their dire need.” - Bede

Today we remember the story of Oswald King of Northumbria, taught by St Aidan, and the famous victory over the pagan king Penda at the Battle of Heavenfield, the site of which remains a place of pilgrimage today and the site of many miracles. One can only imagine the battle that day and the immediacy of threat and danger, an absolute storm of conflict and death. Also, the immediate response of Oswald in the face of the threat to erect a wooden cross and pray.

We have all been there. We have all been caught in one of life's storms, battered by circumstances beyond our control, far from safety, with everything seeming to work against us. None of us passes through life entirely unscathed. Often these storms arrive without warning. When they do, our Gospel today asks us to remember the appearances of the word “immediately.”

Like Oswald at the Battle of Heavenfield, in today's gospel we see it begins with things requiring immediate action. We are told *immediately* after feeding the five thousand, Jesus makes the disciples get into a boat and go ahead of him across the Sea of Galilee while he dismisses the crowds. There is no time to celebrate the miracle or enjoy what has happened. Immediately, they are sent on.

That word matters because it reflects how life often works. Great changes—welcome or unwelcome—can happen immediately. Good news can transform our future in a moment. So can illness, an accident, bereavement, or

another crisis we never expected. Suddenly, life is different. The disciples experience such a change at Jesus' command. They leave him just after an astonishing miracle and soon find their boat battered by waves, far from land, with the wind against them.

The next "immediately" comes as Jesus walks across the water. Why does he do this? Because he wants to be with his disciples. They are in a terrifying storm, and he will not leave them alone. That simple detail carries a powerful promise: whenever we are caught in one of life's storms, Jesus is with us and although He may not immediately calm every storm, he meets us in the middle of it. When the waves batter us, the shore seems distant, and the wind is strong against us, we are not alone.

At first, the disciples are not comforted. Seeing Jesus on the water, they think he is a ghost and cry out in fear. Then comes the word again: immediately Jesus says, *"Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid."*

There is an important lesson about prayer here. Fear does not mean we have no faith, and there is nothing wrong with admitting that we are afraid. Our Lord wants us to call to him from the storm. Turn the cry of fear into a prayer. His answer is his presence: *"Take heart. It is I. Do not be afraid."*

Then Peter says, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." Jesus answers, "Come." Peter gets out of the boat and walks towards him. He does well until he notices the storm. Then he becomes frightened and begins to sink. The storm has been there all along. So have the water and Jesus. What changes is Peter's focus. He looks away from Jesus, looks at the wind and waves, and is overwhelmed.

Perhaps you know that experience. I do. We take our eyes off Jesus, fix them on the storm, and begin to doubt. But notice what happens next. Peter cries, “Lord, save me!” Immediately Jesus reaches out and catches him. There is no delay, punishment, or demand that Peter first prove his faith. Jesus catches him the moment he calls.

That matters because guilt can sometimes stop us asking for help. We may think we have failed, doubted too much, or not been faithful enough. But Jesus still invites us to cry out. He catches Peter first; only then does he ask, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” Grace comes before correction.

When Jesus speaks of “little faith,” he is usually speaking to his followers. He is not condemning those without faith; he is calling those who believe to trust him more. So how is your faith today?

This gospel is a simple story, but it gives us a truth we continually need: Jesus is with us in the storms. Some troubles build slowly; others strike immediately. When they come, remember the disciples. When they cried out in fear, Jesus immediately answered with the assurance of his presence. When Peter became overwhelmed and began to sink, Jesus immediately reached out and caught him.

Christian faith does not promise a life without wind and waves. It promises that the storm is not the whole story, and that we do not face it alone. Prayer may not remove every difficulty at once, but it turns us towards the one who is already coming to us. Even when fear overwhelms us, even when faith feels no larger than a mustard seed, Christ’s hand is near.

So, when life changes immediately, when fear comes immediately, or when you suddenly feel yourself sinking, call out. Take heart. Do not be afraid. Jesus is with you, as

He was with St Oswald who we remember and give thanks for today, all those centuries ago.

Thanks be to God. Amen.