

**Bishop Jaime Soto's homily for the 12th Sunday in Ordinary Time,
June 21, 2015**

In the Gospel today, on a fragile boat tossed about by a terrible tempest, Jesus came to his feet. He rebuked the howling wind and shouted at the raging sea. In that instant the powerful forces of nature conformed to the will of the Word made flesh. It was by the same Divine Word that these forces were first fashioned in the initial moments of creation. That Divine Word speaking with a human voice bridled these powers and created a calm, tranquil world around the tiny wooden vessel filled with the shaken, befuddled, stormed-soaked disciples. "Who then is this whom even wind and sea obey?" they said.

We have experienced a different storm this week, a man-made rage against innocent people who had gathered to study the Word of God at Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina. The dark clouds from that storm surge of violence cast a sad shadow over the nation. The volatile combination of guns and madness have once again left a bloody wake filled with questions, anguished tears, and the pains of old wounds torn open again.

Surprisingly, the horror of that night came up against a different tide yesterday in the courtroom during the bail hearing for accused assailant. Family members of the victims gave a tearful

voice to their pain and then through those tears said, “I forgive you.” They called on the young alleged perpetrator to repent. These were stunning, powerful words. Will they have an impact on that young man’s soul? Will they find their way across the rough waters of public discourse sure to follow this latest episode of a now long sad saga of violent hatred? It can seem that soothing the wind and the seas is more likely than calming reckless human rage.

During the course of this disturbing week, another event of note unfolded. Our Holy Father, Pope Francis, issued a new encyclical, *Laudato Si*, “Praise be to you, O Lord”. In this teaching document the Holy Father brings together the concerns as well as the teachings of his predecessors regarding the care for the earth, our common home. His pastoral initiative may seem unrelated to the tragedies that have seized our attention these past days. Many have focused on his words about the environment as it speaks to the local, national, and global debates on climate change. The heart of his message, though, is more than that. He speaks directly to moral tempest in which we flounder.

The Holy Father connects the fate of all creation to the fundamental work of human solidarity and mutual respect. The lack of harmony among God’s children disrupts and unbalances

all of creation. In a few words, we cannot properly take care of creation unless we care for one another. The prevalent disregard for the earth's resources is symptomatic of humanity's disregard for the dignity of the human person, especially the poor and vulnerable. For this reason, Pope Francis tells us not to rely on technology to solve our environmental dilemmas. He calls us to conversion that can mend the torn social fabric of our communities and heal a wounded world. He calls for a moral climate change, as Paul tells us in the second reading, a new creation.

We have heard a hint of the emerging new creation in the words of the victims' families spoken yesterday in a Charleston courtroom. The powerful words of Jesus, spoken to the wind and sea, now echoed in their voices.

“Whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come.” (II Cor. 5.14-17) May that voice echo in our hearts as well.