

28th Sunday In Ordinary Time, Oct. 12, 2014

Christopher Columbus, whatever else he was, was a man of faith. Whereas others were prophets of doom: "You fool, you could fall off the edge of the world, if you venture too far out there beyond the edge!"

He was also a man of hope, expecting something good out there, way beyond.

Each night at dusk, they sang their night prayers, always ending with "Salve Regina" from the decks of the good ship, "Santa Maria."

Hail Holy Queen, Mother of mercy!"

Through tempests and through calm, on they sailed.
Some years ago I made a trans-Atlantic crossing, pretty much on the same route as Columbus. Half way across we encountered a calm. The ocean was completely still for miles and miles. We sailed on, powered by great engines.

But for a sailing ship, the calm must have been disarming and worrisome.

So eventually, Columbus looked for a sign . . .
And a day came when a land based bird arrived, and then twigs and leaves from an island shore.
Through it all, Columbus sailed on.
His journey is admirable, and in many ways it mirrors ours.

We know both the tempests and the calm.

Today in the Gospel, Jesus tells us not to be looking for signs along the way. Instead, perhaps he would have us know that HE is with us in our boat, whether it is storm tossed, or mired in deathly calm.

Oct. 7 marked the anniversary of a battle from long ago, that has echoes today. In 1571, a powerful fleet from Islam threatened Europe. Many leaders cowered, but one Knight gathered a fleet and went out to confront them. Don Juan of Austria answered the call. And that day Pope Sixtus asked the Christian world to pray the Rosary for his success.

He did prevail and Europe was saved from Islamic conquest, and thus the Pope established Oct. 7, as the Feast of the Holy Rosary.

Today, ISIS has declared Pope Francis as a target.

May they not prevail.

(For a great poem about Don Juan's victory at Lepanto in 1571, Google: Lepanto by Chesterton.)