

## Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost

6/9/15

*“Jesus, Sully and the A320 ...”*

**I speak in the name of Jesus the Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God the Father. Amen.**

On an afternoon in January in 2009, a flock of Canadian geese flew about 3000 feet above the Bronx near New York in a loose echelon formation, tending to their own business as usual, with nothing special in mind. Much about these geese will never be known – for instance, where they came from, and where they were headed, and why – but it is likely that they were large, well fed and self-satisfied. Evidently they were also fairly dumb. Their stupidity cannot be held against them, since they were just birds, after all, but geese are said to be adaptive creatures, and it is hard not to think that they should have had better sense than to go wandering through New York’s City’s skies.

It was also a busy afternoon at La Guardia, one of the busy airports in New York. The air traffic controllers were doing a superb job as usual. At 3:25 pm, US Airways Flight 1549, bound for Charlotte, North Carolina, was cleared for takeoff on the north-east runway, with a turn to the north, and an initial climb to 5000 feet. The airplane in question was an Airbus A320, about ten years old, powered by twin turbofan engines, carrying a full load of 150 passengers and five crew. The airplane was under the command of Chesley (Sully) Sullenberger, a quintessential pilot who, at the age of 57, had accumulated 19663 flight hours.

After an uneventful takeoff, the airplane climbed out of 700 feet and accelerated to 230 miles per hour. The crew checked in with New York departure control and were identified on radar and cleared to 15000 feet. About a minute later, some seconds past 3:27 pm, they came upon the birds. The co-pilot saw them first but had no time to manoeuvre.

While many birds hit the airplane frame, birds were also sucked into both engines. Both turbofan engines, although extremely robust, were not built for this, and subsequently stalled.

Capt Sullenberger immediately said, “My aircraft,” and took the controls, not because he thought the co-pilot couldn’t handle the job but because he was responsible for the airplane as the pilot in command.

TC: “Cactus 1549, turn left. Heading two seven zero.”

CS: “Ah, this is, uh, Cactus 1549, hit birds. We lost thrust in both engines. We’re turning back towards La Guardia.”

TC: “Ok, yeah, you need to return to La Guardia. Turn left, heading of, uh, two two zero.”

CS: “Two two zero”

TC: “Cactus 1549, if we can get it to you, do you want to try to land Runway 13?”

CS: “We’re unable. We may end up in the Hudson.”

In today’s Gospel reading we learn about one of the miracles of Jesus where He heals the sick and banishes demons. Many people argue that somehow modern day life is devoid of miracles and God acting in the world. I disagree. Miracles are all around us every day. The problem is that we have become so used to them that we tend to take them for granted.

For example, do we really appreciate the miracle of life? Do we really respect the absolute miracle of life when every baby is born? Do we stare at the Sun or the Moon wondering about the miracle of the universe around us? So often we are so preoccupied with our daily turmoil and routine that we tend to see past and through God’s actions in the world.

This is sad.

God is with us.

God is acting in the world every day.

Yes, I know. There is also pain and suffering, but God is with us through all of that too. He is with us. Always.

What God requires of you and I is to become a little more wondrous again about the beauty of life, the incredulity of the planet we live on and the miracles we actually witness every day, but yet don't see.

Jesus fed the 5000, not to impress or woo but rather to support and take care of His people. The simple gesture of hospitality became a miracle as the disciples realised it would be impossible to feed such a large group of people. Yet, Jesus calls them to faith and action, and the result? The masses are fed. It was only afterwards that the disciples and perhaps others too, realised that this was a real miracle.

Which takes me back to Captain Sully and his Airbus.

Captain Sully went on in the ensuing seconds to land the fully laden, but crippled Airbus safely on the Hudson River.

Every single person survived.

This for me was a modern day miracle.

This for me was pure evidence of God acting in the world for a greater good.

Yes, you could argue that the people were saved due to the skills of the pilot, the strength of the aircraft or even perhaps just good luck.

As a Christian, I believe otherwise. There were still so many things that could have gone wrong, but didn't. Captain Sully being able to save all of those souls was a miracle. As a Christian this stands out for me in a very profound way.

When I come across news reports of incidents like these, I tend to say to myself, "Oh wow, Jesus is busy again!"

What is the message for you and me then this morning?

Firstly, we need to remember that God is with us. Always. There are miracles happening around us all the time. We need to acknowledge them as they occur and give thanks to our all powerful God for intervening when He does.

Secondly, we need to have faith. Faith that the miracles of the Gospels will continue to happen around us as we go through our daily lives. For our God is a God of action, power and might. He is not afraid. He calmed the waters, fed the 5000 and healed the sick. There is nothing that He cannot do!

Thirdly we must pray that we never become indifferent to the miracles that occur around us. We need to keep our spirit of incredulity and thanks with grace.

Lastly, we need to give thanks for every miracle that we witness or hear about. Pray. Pray fervently. Give thanks.

Our God is the Alpha and Omega. The First and the Last. Nothing is impossible for Him.

Has there perhaps been a miracle of late that has occurred in your life that perhaps you have failed to recognise and failed to give thanks for?

May God bless you in the week ahead as you look forward to the next miracle that will occur in your life.

Amen.