

GOSPEL

MATTHEW 14:22-33

Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side while he would send the crowds away. After sending the crowds away he went up into the hills by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, while the boat, by now far out on the lake, was battling with a heavy sea, for there was a head-wind. In the fourth watch of the night he went towards them, walking on the lake, and when the disciples saw him walking on the lake they were terrified. 'It is a ghost' they said, and cried out in fear. But at once Jesus called out to them, saying 'Courage! It is I! Do not be afraid.' It was Peter who answered. 'Lord,' he said 'if it is you, tell me to come to you across the water.' 'Come' said Jesus. Then Peter got out of the boat and started walking towards Jesus across the water, but as soon as he felt the force of the wind, he took fright and began to sink. 'Lord! Save me!' he cried. Jesus put out his hand at once and held him. 'Man of little faith,' he said 'why did you doubt?' And as they got into the boat the wind dropped. The men in the boat bowed down before him and said, 'Truly, you are the Son of God.'

A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

Today the Gospel passage describes the episode about Jesus who, after praying all night on the shore of the Lake of Galilee, makes his way towards his disciples' boat, walking on the water. The boat is in the middle of the lake, halted by a strong wind blowing against it. When they see Jesus come walking on the water, the disciples mistake him for a ghost and they are afraid. But he reassures them: "Take heart, it is I; have no fear!". Peter, with his characteristic impetuosity, says to him: "Lord, if it is you, bid me come to you on the water"; And Jesus calls him: "Come!". Peter gets out of the boat and begins to walk on the water towards Jesus; but because of the wind, he is afraid and begins to sink. So he cries out: "Lord, save me!" And Jesus reaches out his hand and catches him.

This Gospel narrative contains rich symbolism and makes us reflect on our faith, both as individuals and as an ecclesial community, also the faith of all of us who are here today in the

Square. Does the community, this ecclesial community, have faith? How is the faith in each of us, and the faith of our community? The boat is the life of each one of us, but it is also the life of the Church. The wind against it represents difficulties and trials. Peter's invocation — "Lord, bid me come to you!" — and his cry — "Lord, save me!" — are very similar to our desire to feel the Lord's closeness, but also the fear and anguish that accompany the most difficult moments of our life and of our communities, marked by internal fragility and external difficulties.

At that moment, Jesus' word of reassurance, which was like an outstretched rope to cling to in the face of the hostile and turbulent waters, was not enough for Peter. This is what can happen to us as well. When one does not cling to the Word of the Lord to feel secure, but consults horoscopes and fortune tellers, one begins to sink. This means that the faith is not very strong. Today's Gospel reminds us that faith in the Lord and in his Word does not open a way for us where everything is easy and calm; it does not rescue us from life's storms. Faith gives us the assurance of a Presence, the presence of Jesus who encourages us to overcome the existential tempests, the certainty of a hand that grabs hold of us so as to help us face the difficulties, pointing the way for us even when it is dark. Faith, in short, is not an escape route from life's problems, but it sustains the journey and gives it meaning.

This episode offers a wonderful image of the reality of the Church throughout the ages: a boat that, as she makes the crossing, must also weather contrary winds and storms which threaten to capsize her. What saves her are not the courage and qualities of her men: the guarantee against shipwreck is faith in Christ and in his Word. This is the guarantee: faith in Jesus and in his Word. We are safe on this boat, despite our wretchedness and weaknesses, especially when we are kneeling and worshiping the Lord, like the disciples who, in the end, fell down before him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God!".

How beautiful it is to say this to Jesus: "Truly you are the Son of God!". Shall we say it together, all of us? "Truly you are the Son of God!".

May the Virgin Mary help us to remain steadfast in the faith, to resist life's tempests, to remain on the barque of the Church by shunning the temptation to embark on the seductive but insecure boats of ideologies, fashions and slogans.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- When the disciples saw Jesus walking on the water, Jesus called out to them, "Courage! It is I! Do not be afraid". In your life, what does it mean to trust Jesus?
- Peter's faith appears to be so strong that he dares Jesus to call him out of the boat. When fear sets in, Peter begins to sink. Have you ever felt God call you out of a safe place in your life into the unknown? What happened?
- Faith Circles is a great way to support each other in our faith. Has it been helpful for you and in what ways? What are some other ways we can support each other to grow in our trust of God?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. "Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray")
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others' prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the 'Glory Be' or similar prayer.