

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

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Today's Gospel recounts a particular prodigious deed of Jesus: He walks at night on the waters of the lake of Galilee toward his disciples who are crossing the lake in a boat (cf. Mt 14:22-33). The question is: Why did Jesus do this? Like a show? No! But why? Maybe because of an urgent, unforeseeable need to help his disciples who were blocked by a headwind? No, because he himself had planned everything, he had made them depart that evening. The text even says he "made them" (cf. v. 22). Maybe he did it to give them a demonstration of his greatness and power? But this is not like him, who is such a humble person. So, why did he do it? Why did he want to walk on the waters?

Behind the walking on water there is a message that is not evident, a message we need to grasp. In fact, at that time, great expanses of water were held to be the haunts of evil powers that man was not able to master. Particularly when storms made them turbulent, these abysses were symbols of chaos and recalled the darkness of the underworld. Now, the disciples found

themselves in the middle of the lake when it was dark. They are afraid of sinking, of being sucked in by evil. And here comes Jesus who walks on the water, that is, over the powers of evil. He walks over the forces of evil and says to his disciples: "Take heart, it is I; have no fear" (v. 27). This is the message Jesus gives us. This is the meaning of the sign: the powers of evil that frighten us, that we cannot master, immediately take on smaller proportions with Jesus. By walking on the waters, He wants to say, "Do not be afraid. I put your enemies under my feet" — a beautiful message — I put your enemies under my feet — not people! — not that type of enemy, but death, sin, the devil. These are the enemies of the people, our enemies. And Jesus tramples on these enemies for us.

Today, Christ repeats to each of us, "Take heart, it is I; have no fear!" Take heart because I am here, because you are no longer alone on the turbulent waters of life. And so, what should we do when we find ourselves on the open sea at the mercy of headwinds? What should we do when we face the fear of the open sea, when we see only darkness and we feel we are going under? We need to do two things that the disciples do in the Gospel. What do the disciples do? They call on and welcome Jesus. At the worst moments, in the darkest of storms, call on Jesus and welcome Jesus.

The disciples call on Jesus: Peter walks a little on the waters towards Jesus, but then gets frightened. He sinks and then cries out: "Lord, save me!" (v. 30). Invoke Jesus, call on Jesus. This prayer is beautiful. It expresses the certainty that the Lord can save us, that he conquers our evil and our fears. I invite you to repeat it now all together. Three times together: Lord, save me! Lord, save me! Lord, save me!

And then the disciples welcome. First they call on, then they welcome Jesus into the boat. The text says that as soon as he got into the boat, "the wind ceased" (v. 32). The Lord knows that the boat of our life, as well as the boat of the Church, is threatened by headwinds, and that the sea on which we sail is often turbulent. He does not spare us the hard work of sailing; rather — the Gospel emphasizes — he pushes his disciples to depart. He invites us to face difficulties so they too might become salvific places, so Jesus can conquer them, so they become opportunities to meet

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him. In fact, in our moments of darkness, he comes to meet us, asking to be welcomed like that night on the lake.

So, let us ask ourselves: How do I react when I am afraid, in difficulties? Do I go ahead alone, with my own strength, or do I call on the Lord with trust? And what is my faith like? Do I believe that Christ is stronger than the adversarial waves and winds? But above all: Am I sailing with him? Do I welcome him? Do I make room for him in the boat of my life — never alone, always with Jesus? Do I hand the helm over to Jesus?

In the dark crossings, may Mary, the mother of Jesus, Star of the Sea, help us to seek the light of Jesus.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/ Homily?



Head: Pope Francis says that Jesus walking on the water is a sign that he stands above the powers of evil, fear, sin and death. What does this miracle reveal about who Jesus is and what he came to do?



Heart: When the winds of life become strong, what fears or struggles are most likely to draw your attention away from Jesus?



Hands: Pope Francis says that in the storm the disciples did two things: they called on Jesus and they welcomed him into the boat. What would it look like for you to do one of those things more intentionally this week?

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. Offer 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 praying the ‘Glory Be’