

Meditations: Saturday of the Third Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can enrich our prayer during the 3rd Week in Ordinary Time.

- The tiredness of Jesus, who is perfect man
- Abandoning ourselves in Christ to reach a safe harbor
- Seeing Jesus even amid difficulties

THE SEA of Galilee, 165 kilometers squared on the surface and 43 meters deep, is in fact a modest lake. Despite its small size, however, in Jesus' time it was rich in fish, and violent storms often erupted over it. Today, too, strong gusts of wind converge on the sea from the natural corridors formed by the Jordan Valley and the plain of Esdraelon, causing furious waves, high enough to capsize small boats.

One of those storms struck the lake while Jesus and his disciples were crossing it. It was evening. An intense day of preaching to a large crowd had just ended. There were so many people that Jesus had to board a boat and move a little away from the shore so that they could see and hear Him. The Gospel tells us that Jesus was tired and in the same boat later on: *He was in the stern, asleep on a cushion (Mk 4:38)*. It is the only time the Gospels show us Jesus

sleeping. “All this human behaviour is the behaviour of God. ‘For in him dwells all the fullness of the godhead bodily.’ Christ is God become man: a complete, perfect man. And through his human nature, he shows us what his divine nature is.”^[1] It is moving to contemplate Him like this: exhausted, after a day of work in which He gave Himself completely, depleting his energy and needing deep sleep to recover.

“Jesus’ weariness, a sign of his true humanity, can be seen as a prelude to the Passion with which he brought to fulfilment the work of our redemption.”^[2] He is the perfect man, like us in everything but sin. And we can easily understand that, with grace, we can live his life too, even though it may be difficult at times, even when we are tired, even when we feel the weight of our daily work, done out of love.

A STORM breaks out. The waves rise. The wood of the boat creaks. The disciples, experienced fishermen as they are, tense: their experience tells them that this storm is dangerous. They are amazed that, in this critical situation, Jesus continues to sleep. They wake Him with a sentence that seems reproachful but reveals deep trust: *Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing? (Mk 4:38)*. Jesus stands up, rebukes the wind, and says to the sea, *‘Quiet! Be still! And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. Then He said to them, ‘Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?’ (Mk 4:39-40)*.

Astonished, the disciples are filled with fear again, but now it is a different fear: the greatness of the sea gives way to the greatness of the mystery of Christ, true God and true man. “The solemn gesture of calming

the stormy sea is clearly a sign of Christ's lordship over negative forces and leads them to consider his divinity: 'Who is this?' the disciples ask, amazed and frightened, 'that even the wind and the waves obey Him?' (*Mk 4:41*)."^[3] Their faith is not yet firm; it is still being formed; it is a mix of fear and trust, while Jesus' confident abandonment to the Father is total and pure. Therefore, by the power of love, He can sleep during the storm, completely secure in the arms of God.

Our faith is also still being formed; it is always growing. We frequently get scared and feel fearful or uncertain before the storms in our lives, big or small. Temptations, setbacks, feelings of disappointment in ourselves, and failures are all times to ask Jesus for help to grow in peace and abandonment. As St. Augustine advised: "Do not let the waves drag you into the confusions of your

heart. Even though we are human, let us not despair if the wind drags the affections of our soul. Let us awaken Christ: our journey will be calm, and we will arrive safely.”^[4]

IN AN EMPTY St. Peter's Square, under the rain, in front of a crucifix and an image of our Lady, in March 2020, Pope Francis presided over a prayer vigil during a difficult moment for all of humanity, amidst the pandemic. He chose to comment on the Gospel passage we are meditating on today, and his words can also help us face other difficult moments that may arise in our lives:

““Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?” Lord, you are calling to us, calling us to faith. Which is not so much believing that you exist, but coming to you and trusting in you.

[...] You are calling on us to seize this time of trial as a time of choosing. It is not the time of your judgment, but of our judgment: a time to choose what matters and what passes away, a time to separate what is necessary from what is not. It is a time to get our lives back on track with regard to you, Lord, and to others. [...] ‘Why are you afraid? Have you no faith?’ Faith begins when we realize we are in need of salvation. We are not self-sufficient; by ourselves we flounder: we need the Lord, like ancient navigators needed the stars. Let us invite Jesus into the boats of our lives. Let us hand over our fears to him so that he can conquer them. Like the disciples, we will experience that with him on board there will be no shipwreck. Because this is God’s strength: turning to the good everything that happens to us, even the bad things. He brings serenity into our storms, because with God life never dies.”^[5]

“When suffering comes in such a normal, human form — family difficulties and problems... or those thousand awkward things of ordinary life — you find it hard to see Christ behind it. Open your hands willingly to those nails... and your sorrow will be turned into joy.”^[6] Through the intercession of Holy Mary, the “star of the sea,” let us ask her Son to increase our faith, free us from our fears, and fill us with hope.

^[1] St. Josemaría, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 109.

^[2] Pope Benedict XVI, Angelus, 27-III-2011.

^[3] Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, 21-VI-2009.

^[4] St. Augustine, Sermon 63, 3.

^[5] Pope Francis, Extraordinary moment of prayer, 27-III-2020.

^[6] St. Josemaría, *Furrow*, no. 234.

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