

Meditations: Tuesday of the Eighteenth Week of Ordinary Time

Some reflections that can assist
our prayer during the 18th
week of Ordinary Time.

- A rough sea
- Peter gets out of the boat
- Trusting in Christ's closeness

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AFTER FEEDING the large crowd,
Jesus went up the mountain to pray.

But before leaving He asked the disciples to cross the lake and wait for Him on the other side (cf. *Mt* 14:22-25). Peter and the other apostles set out in the dark. When they had left the shore behind, the boat began to be tossed by the waves and the wind was blowing against them. Naturally, a certain unease started to spread among them. Despite their extensive experience, this sudden change took them by surprise.

The Gospel presents the disciples' boat on the stormy sea as a figure of the life of the Church that sails through the sea of history, apparently defenseless in the face of all the dangers. "The sea symbolizes this life and the instability of the visible world; the storm points to every kind of trial or difficulty that oppresses human beings. The boat, instead, represents the Church, built by Christ and steered by the Apostles.

Jesus wanted to teach the disciples to bear life's adversities courageously, trusting in God.”^[1]

St. Josemaría also realized that Christians will often encounter similar storms when setting out to spread the Gospel. Sometimes it will be external circumstances that pose obstacles; other times, it will be the weight of our own weakness and sins. “We too are carrying out an imperative command from Christ, sailing on a sea stirred up by human passions and errors, and sometimes feeling all our weakness within us, yet firmly determined to bring to port this boat of salvation which the Lord has entrusted to us. Perhaps at times, when we see the force of the wind against us, there rises up from the depths of our hearts the voice of our human impotence: ‘Be gracious to me, O God, for man tramples upon me; all day long an attacker oppresses me; my enemies trample

on me all day long, for many attack me' (*Ps* 55:2-3). He does not leave us, and as often as necessary he has made his presence felt with his loving omnipotence, to fill the hearts of his children with peace and serenity."^[2] —

SEEING Jesus walking on the water, far from reassuring them, at first intensified their fear. The frightened disciples exclaim "It is a ghost!" But Jesus encourages them: "Take heart, it is I; have no fear." Then Peter speaks out boldly: "Lord, if it is you, bid me come to you on the water." And Jesus replies: "Come!" Peter got out of the boat and began walking on the water towards Jesus (cf. *Mt* 14:25-29). Peter's gesture and Jesus' response remind us that God loves our courageous initiatives, especially when they are based on trust in Him.

This scene may call to mind for us the decisive tone with which the sons of Zebedee answered “We can!” to Jesus’ question about their willingness to follow him to the Passion, and so many other magnanimous deeds in the lives of the saints. God loves to see this “leap of faith,” this boldness in following Christ, that enables us to walk on the water through a raging storm.

“The Lord asks us and, in the midst of our tempest, invites us to reawaken and put into practice that solidarity and hope capable of giving strength, support and meaning to these hours when everything seems to be floundering.”^[3] — Peter did something that, at first glance, had no human logic. He abandoned the relative stability of the boat to set forth into a turbulent sea. And in doing so he found true security. Jesus also encourages us not to take refuge in our own certainties, not to isolate

ourselves from the world and from others when we sense that the sea is agitated. Our Lord expects of us an act of bold faith like Peter's, which spurs us not to flee from problems, but rather to embrace them, trusting in the closeness of Christ. "By his cross we have been saved in order to embrace hope and let it strengthen and sustain all measures and all possible avenues for helping us protect ourselves and others. Embracing the Lord in order to embrace hope: that is the strength of faith, which frees us from fear and gives us hope."^[4] —

DESPITE Peter's confidence, when he saw "the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, 'Lord, save me!'" Jesus then "reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, 'O man of little faith, why did

you doubt?”” (*Mt 14:30-31*). Peter was able to walk on the water not by his own strength, but by trusting in Jesus’ words. And he began to sink not because the wind was too strong, but because he had stopped trusting in our Lord. “So it is also for us: if we look only at ourselves we become exposed to the wind and can no longer pass through storms on the waters of life.”^[5] Peter may have thought that he could stand on his own. But it was clear that he could do so only because Christ was holding him up.

At times, like Peter, we will walk on the water and face the storms in life calmly and serenely. And at other times we may think we are sinking. In either situation, our Lord is always near us, for He is in the very depths of our being. But we need to strive to strengthen our relationship with God both when He seems distant and when He is near. As with

Peter, Christ will reach out his hand to us when we feel we are drowning and turn to Him saying: “Lord, save me!” (*Mt 14:30*). The apostles’ experience on the lake shows us that if we let Jesus get into our boat, the wind will calm down (cf. *Mt 14:32*). We can ask Mary, amid the storms that shake our daily life, to make the words of her Son resonate in our hearts: “Take heart, it is I; have no fear” (*Mt 14:27*).

^[1] Benedict XVI, Angelus, 7 August 2011.

^[2] St. Josemaría, *Letter 2*, no. 1.

^[3] Francis, Extraordinary moment of prayer in time of epidemic, 27 March 2020.

^[4] Ibid.

^[5] Benedict XVI, Angelus, 7 August 2011.

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