



PARISH OF ST. AGATHA
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POPE FRANCIS: HAVE FAITH AND NEVER TIRE SEEKING THE LORD

Reflecting on Sunday's Gospel passage about the storm calmed by Jesus, Pope Francis likens the waves and wind to the trials of our daily lives and encourages us to "ask for the grace of a faith that never tires of seeking the Lord." He assures us the Lord is always there by our side waiting for us. Pope Francis focused his reflections on the Sunday Gospel episode recounting when Jesus calmed the high winds and waves threatening the boat crossing with His disciples. The alarmed disciples awakened Jesus, who was asleep in the stern, to ask Him to help them.

The Pope likened the disciples' experience of fear and bewilderment to the trials of our own lives, when we too cry out to the Lord, asking why He seems to be silent and not doing anything. Sometimes we feel we might be sinking when dealing with unemployment or health problems or at the mercy of unrelenting waves of anxiety with no safe harbour in sight, the Pope observed. At times we "risk losing sight of the most important thing": that "Jesus is there, and He shares with His own all that is happening", even if He is sleeping or seems out of sight. This is something that surprises us, but also tests our faith.

The Pope said the Lord is always there and "waits for us to engage Him, to invoke Him, to put Him at the centre of what we are experiencing"; and we must not only believe in God, but be present to Him and even "raise our voice with Him, cry out to Him". He recalled the tragic images we have seen of migrants struggling at sea crying out for help to be saved, a prayer to God. It is helpful to reflect on our own lives and the winds we are facing and the waves that are troubling our navigation, the Pope advised. We need to share this with the Lord and "tell Him everything", since He wants us to find shelter, consolation and support from the "unexpected waves of life". The disciples' waking and speaking to Jesus is the approach we should follow, the Pope said, and this faith helps us see that "alone we are unable to stay afloat". Like sailors navigate looking to the stars in the sky, we too need to look to the Lord.

Knowing that we depend fully on the Lord and His grace is basic to faith, Pope Francis said, and we need to be aware of the temptation of thinking we can manage on our own without disturbing God. Instead, when we cry out to God, "He can work wonders in us", the Pope assured his listeners, and "the gentle and extraordinary power of prayer" can work miracles.

In conclusion, Pope Francis said the question Jesus asked His disciples, "Why are you terrified? Do you not yet have faith?" is directed to us also, especially when we are frozen and focused only on the problem, and not turning our hearts and putting our trust to the Lord, or "to wake Him only in a moment of need". We need to "ask for the grace of a faith that never tires of seeking the Lord, of knocking at the door of His heart", he said. Pope Francis concluded with the prayer that the Virgin Mary's constant trust in God might "reawaken in us the basic need of entrusting ourselves to Him each day". (Vatican News).

THE SHIP OR ARK OF THE CHURCH

The disciples were the Catholic Church's first Bishops and Priests. We see them today travelling on the lake in a boat (Mark 4:38-40). The stormy waves and winds nearly drove them under the water. Initially, they tried to save themselves and the boat, because they left it so late to turn, in trust and faith, to Jesus Our Saviour. They eventually realised, they could not save themselves or the boat, without waking up Jesus, who they had ignored. They foolishly thought they were in control, like Adam and Eve in the Garden. Jesus sleeping soundly implies His trust and faith in the Divine Will of the Father (Psalm 116:6). God is always present to help the simple and humble hearted, even in times that appear hopeless. Jesus addresses the entire Church today asking, **Do you not have faith?** This question frames the Sunday liturgies for the remainder of the year, which the Church calls **Ordinary Time** - until Christmas. As with the Disciples, Jesus is asking each of us to cross over to the other side now, by leaving behind our old sinful ways, and travel with Him. He is inviting us now to board the Ship of the Church, whose destiny is Heaven. It was evening time, symbolising the end times of our earthly lives to come, but He wants us on-board with Him now, before we depart this world.

THE BOAT IS THE CHURCH

The boat portrays the image of the present day Church, and sadly, it also portrays the helpless distrustful Members, who are already on board. The boat also represents our own hearts and souls. The storm filled winds and waves represent Satan trying to sink the Church and Her Members. Jesus been fast asleep, also symbolises all the Members of the Church, laity, religious sisters and priests, who have allowed the faith in their hearts to fall into a deep sleep. They are sleep-walking Christians, who trust in themselves to get through the chaos and storms of this life. Mark's Gospel reveals that Jesus was testing their faith in Him, as He tests us today. Thankfully, illuminated by that little bit of faith and grace, they eventually turned to Him, as a last resort. It worked. We must never forget that the devil will never cease trying to take us down and the Church, but he will not fully succeed, because Jesus will triumph totally in the end. Jesus, the Eternal Priest, defied worldly nature, by walking on water without sinking, which symbolises the Church's Authority over Satan and Death, through Resurrection. To keep the Church afloat in the Ocean of Grace and Mercy, we must collaborate with that Divine Grace, which Jesus sends to us from Heaven, through the Vessel of Grace, who is Mary, the Mother of the Church. We must stop thinking we can fix this present pandemic on our own. We have to turn to Him in full Trust and Hope. This is the signature of Divine Mercy: *Jesus I Trust in You*.

WITHOUT FAITH THE WORLD WILL DIE

If Mary was in the boat, it would never have got to sinking point, because she would have turned to Jesus immediately for intervention, as she did at Cana. Jesus told the holy women on the Way to Calvary (Luke. 23:28-31), that if the world removes Faith from its core value, then it will die. He compares Himself to the green in a healthy tree, but stresses that if the green is removed, then the tree will rot and die. It will fall down. If the world dismisses Faith and removes its Trust and Hope in God, it will also fall. Sadly, most of the world and its people have removed Faith from their lives. They have become Godless. Jesus' Words are coming true. The world is dying and closing down because it has removed God from it. It has become sick. This has not happened overnight.

HOPE AND TRUST IN JESUS

However, there is Hope, and all is not lost. Like the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32), the world needs to *come to its senses* and humbly return to God and repent, by amending our sinful lives. We need to prioritise our principles and show our gratitude and loyalty to our Creator. God will allow the virus to aggressively mutate if we do not turn to Him. The world was due an awakening from its pagan sleep. Let us all awaken Jesus within our hearts, because only He can give us New Life. New Eternal Life begins on earth through entering into a holy communion with God now, through the Eucharist, who is Jesus Christ. Jesus commanded the sea and wind to be open to His Authority, returning them to a humble and gentle setting, just as He commands the bread and wine in Mass, to open and receive His humble gentle Presence, becoming Eucharist. Let us all pray that the world will not continue to behave like dead wood, but become living branches in Jesus Christ, the true Vine, and bear fruit for Eternal Life (Jn 15:1-10). In this Church Year dedicated to St. Joseph, who is the Patron of the Church, we ask him to intercede for its spiritual recovery, asking its members and the whole world to invite God back into our lives and families. The result will be no shipwreck of Faith, because we are anchored to the Crucifix in hope of Everlasting Life. God bless, Fr. Brendan.