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AVE MARIA - "Mary, anchor of our faith"
Rev Luciano Alimandi -

Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - "Then it began to blow a great gale and the waves were breaking into the boat so that it was almost swamped. But he was in the stern, his head on the cushion, asleep. They woke him and said to him, 'Master, do you not care? We are lost!' And he woke up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, 'Quiet now! Be calm!' And the wind dropped, and there followed a great calm. Then he said to them, 'Why are you so frightened? Have you still no faith?" (Mk 4, 37-40)

The episode of the calmed tempest, told in all its drama by the Gospel, reveals the human fragility of the disciples but above all the divine sovereignty of Jesus who calms the wind and the sea with one: and there followed a great calm! Rivers of ink have been written on this passage of the Gospel which well expresses the Christian heart's struggle with evil: the battle for true faith in Christ. Before succeeding in fact we must cross many tempestuous seas, gradually learn, trial after trial, to trust solely in Jesus. All Christians on the journey of faith experience not so much a lack faith, but that they take the wrong paths.

Authentic faith makes no conditions, it rests in Christ. The disciples in the boat which was in danger of sinking had faith in Christ but lacked the confidence he wanted. This is why the Lord admonishes them lovingly: have you no faith! The faith was there but so was fear and disorientation after the mysterious behaviour of Jesus. The Master appeared to be absent from the scene because he was asleep. This is generic faith which unfortunately is not enough; what we must have is total faith in the Person of Jesus: certain faith! The disciples must grow from wavering faith to convinced faith. Mountains will move, the waves of the sea will calm with this sort of faith. If the hearts of the disciples had been filled with this sort of unswerving faith instead of troubling Jesus they themselves in His Name would have been able to calm the waters!

Was it not this type of faith which led to the great miracle at Cana where water was changed into wine? Here the Mother of Jesus with her great faith, practically 'forces' the miracle to happen, she even brings forward the Hour of Jesus, as we are told in the Gospel of St John. Her "Do whatever he tells you to do" testifies total confidence in her Son's almighty power and causes the miracle.

In this regard we are reminded of another act of faith, that of the woman with a haemorrhage who brings about a miracle of Jesus with her act of faith "'If I can just touch his clothes". Almost secretly, in the throng more absent minded than believing which besieged Jesus, she draws close and at that touch of faith in his Person from him there flows - almost uncontrolled - the healing power of the miracle: the woman is healed instantly after she had experienced twelve whole years of painful treatment from doctors with no benefit and spent all she had (cfr. Mk 5, 25-34).

What an extraordinary supernatural reality is Faith! But how many trials must be experienced before we can obtain it as we are told in the Letter to the Hebrews which we are reading at daily mass at the moment. It suffices to think of Abraham's trial: God asked him to believe against all hope in a great descendance. Abraham trusted solely in God and thanks to his unconditioned faith he received the promised fruit: Isaac. But when his heart was in danger of weakening in faith, of resting in Isaac, the Lord asked him to offer his son.

Faith, to remain unconditioned, must be continually freed from our conditionings which would weigh it down and bury it at the bottom of the heart. For Abraham, as for Moses and for us, the same is true: trials, tempests are needed to shake the profundity of the human heart and make more space for God alone.

Down through the centuries the Church has often been likened to a ship sailing through storms and tempests, but always saved by her Founder: the gates of hell will not prevail against you!

St John Bosco, whose feast is celebrated today in the whole universal Church, in one of his famous forecasts about the Church sees her as a ship sailing amidst countless dangers, guided by the great helmsman the Pope and saved because anchored to "two columns" one bearing the Most Holy Eucharist and the other Mary Help of

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Christians. So too in our day: Pope Benedict XVI following his Predecessors especially John Paul II, steers the ship and then anchors it again. For our part, we who are in this same boat are called to turn our hearts to Jesus and Mary in unity with the Pope so we may each be anchored to God! (Agenzia Fides 31/1/2007 - righe 52, parole 815)

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