

## FAINTHEARTEDNESS

In today's Gospel reading according to St. Matthew (14: 22-34), we are led out into the storm-laden and choppy waters of life:

And straightway Jesus constrained his disciples to get into a ship, and to go before him unto the other side, while he sent the multitudes away. And when he had sent the multitudes away, he went up into a mountain apart to pray: and when the evening was come, he was there alone. But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves: for the wind was contrary. And in the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased. Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God. And when they were gone over, they came into the land of Gennesaret.

Our Lord "constrained" His disciples to embark on a perilous journey, knowing that the seas would become difficult to navigate, and chose not to be (physically) amongst them. Knowing that His disciples would be severely tested and tried in their future ministry, such experiences were deemed necessary for spiritual training. Hardship is offered by our loving Saviour to cultivate a spirit of longsuffering, patience, and endurance, as well as faithful dependency on Christ. The foundation of such virtues is faith, and requires a chipping away of self-reliance, confidence and self-justification, which are rooted in pride, the principle obstacle to our eternal salvation. Our Lord calls all, not just His disciples, to a path of holiness:

What is holiness? Freedom from every sin, and the fullness of virtue. This is only attained by a few zealous persons in this life, and that not suddenly, but gradually, by prolonged and manifold sorrows, sicknesses, and labors, by fasting, vigilance and prayer; and that not by their own strength, but by the grace of Christ.

St. John of Kronstadt (My Life in Christ)

After being tossed about in an unstable ship, rocked by stormy seas for greater than 9 hours (at least 3 "watches"), our Lord, the Master and Creator of all things material, showed His dominion over the

elements by walking towards them on the boisterous seas. In the spirit of reassurance, He compels them to “be not afraid”.

Peter, emboldened by our Lord’s reassurance, seeks a blessing to come upon the water and join our Saviour. His request though, reveals an element of doubt, “if it be thou...”. Despite that doubt, our compassionate and patient Lord condescended to his desire, and granted him to overcome the restraints of gravity and the dangers of the stormy waters. As long as Peter’s gaze remained faithfully fixed on our Saviour, our Lord’s grace enabled him to overcome physical limits, through the action of his divine Grace. Once Peter took his gaze away from our Saviour, focusing on the winds and stormy conditions, he succumbed to fear and his faith plummeted. That severed the “tow line” of Grace, and immediately rendered him vulnerable to the elements. Seeing imminent doom, Peter calls out to Christ, “Lord , save me!” Our merciful Lord, Who does not abandon a repentant sinner, saves him from doom.

Our Lord then makes clear the reason for Peter’s near drowning: his faintheartedness, his weakening of faith. This is offered as a lesson not just to Peter and the other disciples, but for all faithful.

Our merciful Lord, Who seeks to guide us to eternal salvation, promises: tribulations (John 16:33), persecutions (Matthew 14: 22-34), family betrayal (Matthew 10:21), and steers us through the narrow gate (Matthew 7: 13-14).

Why is it that only the narrow way and narrow gate leads to [eternal] life? Who makes the way of the chosen narrow? The world oppresses the chosen, the flesh oppresses them, the devil oppresses them; it is these that make our way to the kingdom narrow.

St. John of Kronstadt (My Life in Christ)

Like the disciples, our life in His Church is a laden with challenges, temptations and struggles. The more we advance in the spiritual life, the greater the struggles. Knowing this, our Saviour provides us with “training” opportunities. Such opportunities are designed to bolster and reinforce our faith in Christ, and also activate a commensurate whittling away of our self-reliance and self-faith.

Without me, ye can do nothing (John 15:5).

As our Saviour allows us to enter the choppy and stormy waters of life, may we learn to fix the gaze of our spiritual eyes on Him always, Who will provide whatever we need to advance as long as our faith is unwavering.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

