

## **“WHY ARE YOU TERRIFIED? DO YOU NOT HAVE FAITH?”**

June 25<sup>th</sup>, Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Times-Job. 38: 1, 8-11; 2 Cor. 5:14-17; Mk. 4: 35-41

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“*Why are you terrified? Do you not have faith?*” These questions of Jesus to the first disciples are perennial questions to every single disciple of every age. Besides, they are very personal questions to me and to you who are given the gratuitous gift of God—the gift of the discipleship of Christ.

These questions are comprehensive, deep and signify many things and sum up the whole relationship of Jesus with any of his disciples. To understand the profound meaning of these questions, we need to recall a statement of the Evangelist John to whom the Scripture gives a special attribute: “*the disciple whom Jesus loved*”. In fact, he must have a true understanding of what Jesus had in His heart because of his more intimate relationship with the Lord. This fact is underlined when the scripture projects him as resting his head on the Lord’s chest at the Last Supper. Now, John’s revealing statement that will help us to understand today’s gospel theme is this: “*He loved his own in the world and he loved them to the end*” ( Jn. 13:1).

As we understand the meaning of this emphatic statement more and more, we realize that, Jesus’ questions, “*why are you terrified? Do you not have faith?*” are more of an expression of His burning love for his fear-stricken disciples than a rebuke. You will understand it better if you can imagine your little child being terrified at the sight of a passing dog and you asking the child clinging to you the same questions. It is nothing but an expression of love for your beloved child that flows from your heart though the words may sound as a rebuke! In fact, such questions are not questions at all but words of definite assurance of your loving protection for the child. Because you being that child’s parent, you are extremely concerned with anything that may happen to that child. Don’t all these loving anxieties imply in your questions of exclamation? Could it be anything different when Jesus asked : ““*Why are you terrified? Do you not have faith?*”

Now, let us try a comparison between the love of a parent for his/her children and the love of Jesus Christ for his disciples. The Scripture tells us that the difference is incomparably great. Take for example God’s solemn promise through the prophet Isaiah: “*Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even should she forget, I will never forget you*” ( Is. 49:15). Here, God gives an unconditional guarantee that His love for us far, far exceeds even the sincerest worldly love! It is not difficult to understand this if only we understand Christ’s atoning death on the cross for the emancipation of each one of us.

The Scripture we heard from the book of Hosea on the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus two days ago reveals that God’s love for us surpasses our iniquities and continued unfaithfulness: “*When Israel was a child I loved him, out of Egypt I called my son. The more I called them, the farther they went from me, sacrificing to the Baals and burning incense to idols. Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk, who took them in my arms; I drew them with human cords, with bands of love; I fostered them like one who raises an infant to his cheeks; Yet, though I stooped to feed my child, they did not know that I was their healer... O Ephraim, or deliver you up, O Israel? ...My heart is overwhelmed, my pity is stirred. I will not give vent to my blazing anger, I will not destroy Ephraim again; For I*

*am God and not man, the Holy One present among you; I will not let the flames consume you” Hosea 11:1-9).*

Yes, He is God, not man! So, when Jesus asked the anxious disciples, “why are you terrified? Do you not have faith?” He was assuring them of the infinite love of God, and not of man's impulsive love and wanted them to put their entire trust in His almighty power to subdue the storm and rescue them from the danger. He then rebuked the wind and calmed the sea. They were struck with awe and wonder at this manifestation of his divine power. The memory of this striking incident must often have helped the apostles regain their serenity in the face of struggles and difficulties. This can be a good answer to the question: ‘why trials and sufferings come to good people’. St. Peter, who was so terrified at that storm, could later tell all the Church thus: “*Let Him have all your worries and cares, for He is always thinking about you and watching everything that concerns you... Trust the Lord; and remember that other Christians all around the world are going through these sufferings too*” ( I Pet. 5:7, 9).

Now, what can be the storm or the suffering we may have to undergo? St. Augustine's words give us an idea of the primary meaning of storm as far as a Christian, a disciple of Christ, is concerned. He says: “As a vessel on the sea is exposed to a thousand dangers—pirates, quicksand's, hidden rocks, tempests—so man in this life is encompassed with perils, arising from the temptations of hell, from the occasions of sin, from the scandal or bad counsels of men, from human respect, and above all from the passions of corrupt nature. This should not cause him to lose confidence. Rather when you find yourself assaulted by a violent passion, take whatever steps you can to avoid the occasion of sin and place your reliance on God. When the tempest is violent, the pilot never takes his eyes from the light which guides him to port. In like manner, we should keep our eyes always turned to God, who alone can deliver us from the many dangers to which we are exposed” ( St. Augustine, Sermons 51). These words of Augustine remind us that the storm we all have to face is chiefly the storm in our spiritual life—in the spiritual war—and for that we must keep on placing ourselves in God's hands continuously. My help comes from the LORD, the maker of heaven and earth. God will not allow your foot to slip; your guardian does not sleep. Truly, the guardian of Israel never slumbers nor sleeps. The LORD is your guardian; the LORD is your shade at your right hand” ( Ps. 121;3-5).

Storm can also mean the burdens and trials of our day- today life. Addiction to alcohol, drug, sex, or an economic or health crisis, or a family crisis—all these are storms. A storm can arise also because of frustration and despair that we feel when we are denied due recognition or left lonely. Regrets about the past and anxieties about the future also can create storms in our life. Undeserved suffering can certainly cause a severe storm. But, in all such situations a true Christian is to be led by faith, as the Scripture says: “*The one who is righteous by faith will live*” ( Rom. 1:17).

A very real storm is the displeasure we may incur by our adherence to the gospel values or the teachings of the Church and by testifying to it publicly. St. Thomas More, whose sacred memory the Church celebrated last Thursday, is the typical example. He had a remarkable political career in London. He was a uniquely successful lawyer. In 1999 he was voted as the lawyer of the Millennium by the Law Society of Great Britain. He was member of Kings' Council. He was Deputy Treasurer. He had been honored with Knighthood. He was Speaker of the Council. Finally, he was appointed by the King to the post of the Lord Chancellor, next to the king in power and prestige—a post never given before to a layman.

The relationship between King Henry VIII and Thomas More was so close that it became the talk of the public. But when King Henry violated the Divine Law of the indissolubility of marriage by divorcing his lawful wife and marrying another woman and disobeyed the Pope by asserting the power of the State over the Church, St. Thomas More resigned his Chancellor's Post. Though he was imprisoned and tortured mentally and physically to change his mind and win his support for the King, he refused. All his friends and even his beloved wife asked him to keep silent at the Kings' divorce, in the interest of his safety. But he not only turned away the advice of the beloved ones but also, at his trial, made a powerful defense of the indissolubility of marriage. As a result, he was finally condemned by the court and beheaded. On a special royal decree Thomas Mores' head was exhibited on the London Bridge for a month. Thus Thomas more became a martyr for upholding the sanctity of the Indissolubility of marriage. This is a most typical example of living the faith.

What is this faith? St. Paul, a disciple who had to suffer persecutions unjustly more than any of the other apostles for being a faithful disciple, tells us about it very clearly: *"What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword? As it is written: "For your sake we are being slain all the day; we are looked upon as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we conquer overwhelmingly through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord"* ( Rom. 8:35-39). Here, what Paul tells us is that once we understand *"the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ (that surpasses knowledge) we will be filled with all the fullness of God and then we will have a new perspective in looking at everything. This is what Paul refers to in today's 2<sup>nd</sup> reading :* *"For the love of Christ impels us...He indeed died for all, so that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised"* ( 2 Cor. 5: 14-15).

Dear Brothers and Sisters, let us enter deep into the mystery of the love of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and hand over to Him all our burdens and worries. Let us take to heart the Psalm: *"God will not allow your foot to slip; your guardian does not sleep. Truly, the guardian of Israel never slumbers nor sleeps. The LORD is your guardian; the LORD is your shade at your right hand"* ( Ps. 121:3-5). Let the most loving words of Jesus: *"Why are you terrified? Do you not have faith?"* echo in our hearts unceasingly and fill them with a passionate love for the Lord that makes us ready for any sacrifice for His sake, i.e. to live in His love for ever.