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Walking on Water by Father Ezra Sullivan OP

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General intro: Walking on Water

I would like to begin by telling the organisers of this conference that I am doubly thankful for their work. First of all, I am grateful for the fact that they organised a similar conference in 2015. Back then— when I was twenty pounds lighter and had no grey in my beard—I attended the conference here in Rome, at this very same venue, and the entire event was very striking to me. Aside from the excellent talks, it was also a time of fraternity. I remember sitting near a particularly talkative and friendly Scotsman during one of the meals. We really hit it off — we saw eye-to-eye on things, dove into interesting theological discussions, and, most importantly, his jokes were pretty funny. We exchanged info. A number of months later, I happened to be giving a talk in Edinburgh, so I contacted Fr. Steven, and took a train to meet him. He was the soul of hospitality, showed me around his hometown—and even drove me to another town and bought me lunch, though he didn't really have the time. Priestly friendship in a time of need; I'm still in awe at his generosity.

So I'm grateful to the organisers for what they created a decade ago, and I'm grateful to be invited to speak here now. I'm particularly honoured to be among this fine roster of speakers, each of whom I admire, not least for the courage they have shown these past ten years in their fidelity to the one, holy, Catholic, and apostolic faith.

Troubled Times

No time, since the fall of Adam and Eve, is without its troubles, but some times are more troubled than others. Just as in nature there are times of rain and times of bright sunshine; and just as in politics there are times of war and times of peace, so some seasons of life are stormier than others.

For many, their sense of “troubled times” comes from news reports of international upheaval. In Florida, hurricanes are an annual source of interest and conversation; in California, it's the forest fires. For years, one of the main topics of conversation was

COVID. Then the conflict in Ukraine gained worldwide attention. After that, the conflict between Palestine and Israel. And other wars threaten on the horizon.

The political cycle also reveals the troubles of our times: bribery, incompetence, bluster, insults, embarrassments, weak laws, biased law-enforcement, widespread lawlessness. The economy seems weak; many good folks are without jobs; and those with jobs often struggle to make ends meet.

All of this may make an observer wonder where the world is going. Are we heading toward a worldwide tyranny? Will our basic rights be expunged? Is the environment headed toward destruction if we don't turn things around? Can we avoid mass casualties? How will the Church navigate these choppy waters?

The storms of life

The following incident is so important that it is related by each of the Gospels. After having multiplied the loaves and fish to feed a crowd of thousands, Christ made his disciples “get into the boat and go before him to the other side. ... When evening came, the boat by this time was many furlongs distant from the land, beaten by the waves; for the wind was against them” (Mt 14:21-24, *passim*).

Christ commands his disciples to get into the boat. To clamber into a boat and attempt to navigate it across the waters is to use an instrument created by reason—the vessel itself—in order to harness the powers of nature and direct them to a voluntary end, in this case, the other shore—the goal established for them by Christ.

Although experienced in the ways of sailing, the disciples nevertheless were told to embark on a dangerous endeavour. In ancient times, it was fairly uncommon for Israelites—including fishermen—to know how to swim.^[1] Even when waters were calm, to traverse a lake was perilous. Perhaps that day the disciples did not suspect that any storm would arise. Guides in Israel will tell pilgrims that sudden squalls can appear without warning on the Sea of Galilee.

To anyone who is dry, any storm can be unpleasant; but to a person on a boat, a storm is fearsome. Darkness during a storm causes even greater fright, for without the sun or stars, the sailor cannot see the shore nor orient himself in the right direction.

The Gospel text says that the disciples were “beaten by the waves”: the rushing water battered against them, uncaring. “The wind was against them”: it blew contrary to their strain, and seemed almost maliciously to thwart their efforts to do good. Mark 6:48 adds, “they were tossed about while rowing”: despite doing their best, the waves “beat” them, conquered their strength, snuffed out their courage, and laid bare their weakness. Nature itself and all the circumstances of that moment seemed to rise up against their intention to obey Christ. If we are attentive and join the disciples in this moment, we can discover lessons that tell us about the storms of life that we priests face, and how to be holy in our troubled times.

Troubles in the Church

Just as there were troubles out on the water, so there were troubles—probably felt more intensely, because they were more personal—on deck. The boat with the disciples can simultaneously represent the Church as a whole, as when St. Gregory the Great, upon being elected as pope, wrote in a letter to the Patriarch of Constantinople, “I, unworthy and weak, have taken charge of an old and grievously shattered ship (for on all sides the waves enter, and the planks, battered by a daily and violent storm, seem ready to shipwreck).”^[2] The boat can also represent your community, and your own personal life, especially your vocation. Gregory the Great also uses this imagery, saying, “On every side I am tossed by the waves of business, and sunk by storms, so that I may truly say, ‘I am come into the depth of the sea, and the storm has overwhelmed me’ (Ps 69:2).”^[3]

With respect to the Church, there is undeniable turmoil on the deck of Peter’s bark. Our age is surely not without the troubles of times past: corrupt clergy, rebellious laity, widespread heresy, unveiled scandals, accusations of injustice on all sides—just listen to what St. Paul lists: hidden things of dishonesty, craftiness, adulterating the word of God (2 Cor 4:2); false apostles (2 Cor 11:13); those who “serve not Christ our Lord but their own belly: and by pleasing speeches and good words seduce the hearts of the innocent” (Rom 16:18); men who “pervert the gospel of Christ” (Gal 1:7); “men who are depraved in mind and bereft of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain” (1 Tim 6:5).

Church history shows that problems with, for, and from the clergy have never ceased. Every ecumenical council, and nearly every local council, has made the “reform of the clergy” one of its main themes. For example, the first canon of the First Ecumenical Council, held at Nicaea in 325, treats the problem of clergy who have been castrated, essentially saying that if they did it to themselves, they are not to continue their ministry. Another canon, can. 17, laicises clergy who “devises schemes for dishonest profit.” In one century, a council condemns false ordinations by a man pretending to be bishop; another condemns the practice of ordaining men who are ordained for love of glory or power; over a span of over a thousand years, council after council repudiates bishops who ordain men for personal gain and profit, priests who embrace heresy, and any cleric that lives a dissolute life; the Council of Trent reformed nearly aspect of clerical life, and these reforms lasted nearly 500 years; and, as we all know, Vatican II reshaped the life of the clergy, and the jury is still out on the results, but the storms faced in the ordained life have certainly not ceased.

As for your community, there might yet be additional trouble and turmoil. It is not infrequent that parishes the Western world over are nearly drowned in debt, failing infrastructure, lower mass attendance, indifference to the sacraments, lack of energetic and competent volunteers, liturgy wars, and difficult personalities. Perhaps there are other, particular storms that threaten to swamp your local boat.

Then, there is you personally: Some are struggling with the present scars of past sufferings, unresolved trauma, moral wounds of betrayals, misunderstandings, injustices endured, injustices perpetrated, lost opportunities, thwarted ambitions, unrealised hopes, disappointments, failures, and disasters. Health troubles, money troubles, family troubles: if you do not suffer from them, someone you love does suffer from them, and you might lament that you can do little to alleviate their pain. Then there is issue of your sin: sins

committed, habits developed, temptations knocking at your door, and all the many difficulties of living up the calling of being a Catholic. Perhaps there are some here that feel far from home and beaten by the waves, as if all the winds of life are against you, and you cannot master them no matter how hard you row, how much you trim your sails.

God: Creator of the waters, Master of the storm

With the turbulent storm boiling all around us, let us zoom out of the scene and see the Sea of Galilee grow gradually smaller as we climb higher and higher into the air, until we can see the curve of the globe and notice that there are other places entirely without storms. Christ, for instance, was atop the mountain, alone, praying—and, it seems, entirely dry. Peoples have commonly seen mountaintops as the abode of the gods. The craggy heights of Mt Olympus and the snowy peak of Mt Fuji were the homes of preternatural beings, inaccessible, distant, and relatively unaffected by the surging world below. Christ was on the mountain in his human body, but in his divine nature, with God the Father and the Holy Spirit, he exists transcendentally above all of creation. As the Psalmist sings: “The LORD is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens! Who is like the LORD our God, who is seated on high, who looks far down upon the heavens and the earth?” (Ps 113:4-6). God looks down upon the created heavens, because He is infinitely above them. His immeasurably perfect being is untroubled by flux, untouched by decay, unmarred by the seas of chaos. From all eternity, God is unchanged and unchanging. St Augustine puts it this way:

You are before all the past by the eminence of Your ever-present eternity: and You dominate all the future ... and once it has come it will be past, but You are always the self-same, and Your years shall not fail [Ps 102:27]. Your years neither come nor go, that all may come. Your years abide all in one act of abiding ... whereas our years shall not all be, till all are no more. Your years are a single day; and Your day comes not daily but is today, a today which does not yield place to any tomorrow or follow upon any yesterday. In You today is eternity. ... You are the Maker of all time, and before all time You are. ... And no time is co-eternal with You, for you stand changeless.[4]

From that changeless eternity, God created the flow of time, which is marked by change in the world. Within that world, God also made the oceans: Gen 1:6, “God made the firmament and separated the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament.” Similar to how the “place” in which time exists is this changing, created world, so God also commanded water to “be in place”: “God said, ‘Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place’” (Gen 1:9). When waters are in one place, they are level, and provide a measure for what is level. There is a “place” in present creation for danger, uncertainty, even some elements of chaos, but as St. Basil the Great reminds us, those waters are surrounded by the order of dry land, that is, by the intelligible wisdom of the enduring Word of God.[5]

Within the world of incomplete order and partial chaos, God placed man. Creating the human soul from nothing and matching it with a suitable body, God endowed man with rationality, which enables man to craft what he needs for his flourishing. So men made boats. With the invention of boats came the discovery of seasickness.

Man is not a master of chaos, but with some skill, he can often navigate through the chaos and arrive to stable land on the other side. Other times, man must rely on the immediate intervention of God to escape alive.

God made this world. He fashioned these times, He formed these waters, He allows these storms, and He has commanded us to enter them. God's providence has placed you precisely where you are, at this very time, and He has equipped you to weather the storm with His help. It is natural to desire safety, tranquility, predictability. But sometimes, the storm is our lot. As Tolkien narrates in *The Lord of the Rings*:

[Gandalf said] "Sauron the Great, the Dark Lord ... has indeed arisen again. ... Always after a defeat and a respite, the Shadow takes another shape and grows again."

'I wish it need not have happened in my time,' said Frodo.

'So do I,' said Gandalf, 'and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.'^[6]

The very nature of God teaches us that peace exists perfectly in His own divine nature, and only imperfectly here on earth. All times are troubled, and our time has special troubles, but these troubles are above the chaos of sin embraced by the heart, which entails a spiritual distance from the Holy Trinity. It is our call to enter the chaos and there, in the heart of it, to encounter the peace of Christ.

Peter's call to walk on water

We come now to consider Peter, not insofar as he is a symbol of popes and bishops, but as he symbolises the ordained priest who encounters dangers and difficulties in the midst of his vocation.

"Lord, if it is you, bid me come to you on the water" (Mt 14:28): this is what every man says when he discerns his call from God: "bid me do something supernatural, to meet you on unstable waters in troubled times."

Holiness is more than merely being honest and upright. The major ethical systems have some belief in the Silver Rule: "Do not do to others what you would not have them do to you." That is, avoid robbery, violence, extortion, defrauding another of his rights, harming his reputation, and so on. Many cultures have a version of the Golden Rule, which is stated positively: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Hence, virtues such as generosity, kindness, honesty, fair play, and justice are inculcated. Throughout the world, one can find people who help clothe the naked with extra clothes; and feed the poor, if they have food to spare; and serve the common good to which they belong. But to avoid evil on the one hand, and to practice all of these on the other than, does not constitute the essence of holiness. Christ says to his disciples: "And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same" (Lk 6:33).

There is a certain exterior form of religiosity that is closer to holiness but is only the exterior shell to the nourishing nut within. This exterior conformity is not so much righteousness; it is rightness in action. The almost holy person does nothing that Christ and the Church forbid. He does not take the name of God in vain; he not only avoids all outward adultery, he also avoids unchastity and uncleanness, in all looks and words and thoughts that lead to it; he avoids harmful words, all backbiting, gossip, detraction, rash judgment, arrogant tones, and unedifying conversation. He not only avoids excessive wine, whiskey, or gin, he also abstains at times when such drink would be legitimate; he keeps trim because he cares for his body, and because he is exacting on fast days, and because gluttony does not rule him. He tries to avoid unnecessary contention, and strives to live peaceably with others; and if his enemies should harm him, he remains calm and does not seek revenge, and he does not willingly wrong or grieve his neighbor, for he remembers the example of Christ and the saints.

A good man does not limit himself to doing the cheap and easy things; he is not slothful, but works hard at whatever he does; he is reasonable, even-keeled, and reliable. If he has a charismatic personality, he is not thereby arrogant; if he is mild and retiring, he is nonetheless friendly and likeable. When necessary, he comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable; he instructs the ignorant, strengthens the weak, and encourages the good. He is faithful in all his duties, but especially those derived from his state of life. The good priest celebrates mass precisely without adding, omitting, or changing anything; he genuflects before the Blessed Sacrament without self-consciousness; he accepts compliments without vanity—and without asking for them; he keeps the books accurately, and works with parish staff and volunteers well; is not indifferent to the needs of his people, but does not allow the demands of the few to dominate the reasonable expectations of the many; in private, he says the Divine Office, and is attentive to the meaning of the words; he will even pray the rosary in free moments, and spend time before the Blessed Sacrament; he recognises that moderate recreation is good, but does not allow himself to waste hours watching television programs when his time could be better spent; he prepares for his homilies thoughtfully, and delivers them without heresy or narcissism.

Despite all of this, a good man might still lack the heroic goodness and virtue that the Church calls holiness. If he does good things attentively, yet harbours in his heart a selfish motive, then the man is not holy at all: he might be vain, or a hypocrite. If he does all these things merely out of duty, and to avoid criticism from the people, or punishment from the bishop, then he is only a worker in God's kingdom, but not yet a co-heir with the son.

The totality of the natural world, before the corruption of sin, was declared "very good" by God on account of the perfection of the species that exist within it, the splendor of their beauty as individuals and in relation to one another, the processes by which all things are ordered to their ultimate good, and so on. However, the good of grace is incalculably greater, for by it humans are regenerated and participate in the divine nature.^[7] St. Thomas says that grace is so great that "The justification of the wicked, which terminates at the eternal good of a participation in the Godhead, is greater than the creation of Heaven and earth, which terminates at the good of mutable nature."^[8] Matthias Scheeben extends this reasoning and argues that grace "has its measure and end only in the infinity of God" and therefore in a certain sense is infinite: "Every degree of grace is infinitely valuable."^[9] Thus, if we were to take all earthly treasures, every beautiful chalice and

crucifix and painting, all of St. Peter's Basilica and every church that has ever existed, and add to that the entire earth and indeed the whole cosmos—this would still be less than the smallest amount of grace, for the supernatural exceeds the natural even more than the human being exceeds the ant. Thus, holiness is supernatural — it aims at a good that is not found in nature.[10]

What is lacking from a merely good person is this: a sincere, abiding, fervent love of God. The horizon of his heart is the limits of this world. Perhaps one of the best images to understand this is image of a wife who does not love her husband. A number of men have shared with me this experience; and it is also utilised in Sacred Scripture, such as by the Prophet Hosea.

We can easily imagine the situation of a man who is in love with his wife, who in romance brings her flowers and tries to please her. Meanwhile, she gives him the cold shoulder. Sure, she does her duties for the family: maybe she cooks and cleans, or takes the children to school, or works to help support the family. She might even give her husband the perfunctory kiss. But it is obvious that she does so without love. The husband doesn't expect enthusiasm from her, or some exaggerated emotional response to his presence. He just wants to know that she cares for him, not just as a provider but as a husband whom she loves. Not just what he can do for her, what advantages he brings, but for who he is in himself. Instead of seeing herself as a beloved, however, the wife sees herself in a contractual relationship and she tries to manipulate him and the situation to her advantage, even when she goes through the motions of married life.

What a difference is the man who loves God, in contrast to one who only obeys Him! The good man obeys God like a mercenary, but the holy man obeys out of love. The name of Christ is in his heart, and on his tongue. Like St. Dominic, he either always speaks to God or of God. His heart is a burning furnace lit by the fire of divine charity. His delight is in the Lord his God; his entire soul is full of the overflowing presence of God; he spends all of his strength to please God; he knows that God is a friend, and he speaks often with him, and intimately, with trust and thanks and affection.

- The love of God unites you with Him in the depths of your mind, will, and affections;
- The love of God effects a “mutual indwelling” between you and God, whereby you rest in His heart, and He rests in yours;
- The love of God produces an “ecstasy” in which you are brought outside of your own petty interests, and you focus on the glory and honor of God, and the good of souls so that they might love God as well;
- The love of God stirs up a zeal in you, so that you desire intensely to serve Him, and to strive against whatever hinders the love of God and the salvation of souls;
- The love of God melts the coldness of your heart, which has seen many chilling things; and it softens and opens your heart to love again, especially to love God and His friends;
- The love of God can even induce a “wound of love” in which you feel pain at being distant from God, and you long to be united with Him forever in heaven;
- The love of God inflames your fervour, so that you and your neighbour might possess God more fully, and be rid of all your imperfections which cool your love;

- The love of God forms, enlivens, and directs every other act that you do, so that it is a cause of your actions: all for the love of God. Thus, Thomas Aquinas calls charity the “foundation or root” of all virtues by uniting them to God, the source of all life; it is the “mother” of all virtue because through the power of God “charity conceives the acts of the virtues within itself.”^[11]
- Therefore, the love God enables you to withstand all pressure, to endure every pain, to cut a path through the wind and waves of this present darkness, and to arrive on the bright solid shore of eternal life.

How do we live out such a love of God? It is impossible on your own. Significantly, the Egyptian hieroglyphic of “doing a thing impossible” was a man’s walking upon water.^[12]

Humans can do natural things on their own, such as taking a spouse, getting a job, cultivating a garden, and so on. But because of sin, a person with his natural powers can achieve natural goods imperfectly, with many mistakes, and then only as directed to some natural end. But all of us are called to be holy: this supernatural end cannot be achieved on our power, no matter how sincere his intentions and how strong his efforts.

A plant, plucked up from the soil, could more easily re-plant itself than a man can achieve his supernatural vocation without grace.

A man whose heart has been ripped out, and replaced with a stone, could more easily replace his vital organ than a man could achieve his supernatural vocation without grace.

A civilisation subject to nuclear apocalypse wherein all buildings, all cultural artefacts, all records of its history, could more easily rebuild itself to its former glory than a man could achieve his supernatural vocation without grace.

To live our supernatural vocation of loving God above all things, and loving our neighbour with God’s own love, is more difficult than for a man to walk on water by his own power.

Aquinas: “in the state of corrupted nature man cannot fulfil all the Divine commandments without healing grace.”^[13] Again: “because all have sinned and cannot of themselves be justified, they need some other cause to make them just.” That cause is the grace that comes from the redemptive work of Christ.^[14]

Christ comes to us, so that we might come to him

“in the fourth watch of the night [Christ] came to them, walking on the sea” (Mt 14:25). There are many lessons here.

First, Christ sees our troubles—past, present, and those yet to come—and he cares. Christ was on the mountain, and yet knew of the plight of his friends; even now, in heaven, he sees our troubling times, and he has particular compassion for his friends.

According to Homer, Kronos, the god of Time, divided the world among his three sons: “Hades drew the lot of the mists and the darkness, Zeus was allotted the wide sky,” and to Neptune, “the gray sea to live in forever.”^[15] But to Christ belongs the earth, the sea, the sky—all times, all places, for as God Incarnate he transcends all creation while providentially working within it.

Second, although we cannot see him, Christ sees us. We should not make the mistake common to atheists and infants, a mistake I like to call the “peak-a-boo” fallacy, namely: to think that if we cannot see someone, they cannot see us; or they might not even exist. Knowledge is asymmetrical. The higher can have knowledge of the lower, even when hidden from the lower: the man can see the ant, even if the ant only sees his footprints, and God sees us and knows us more intimately than we see and know ourselves.

It should not surprise us that Christ is hidden from us now. He was hidden even when he walked the earth: hidden in his birth, except from a few; hidden in his youth, but for a single moment in the Temple; hidden in his maturity, but for three years, and even then, when harassed he stayed outside of Jerusalem, and when brought to the edge of a hill to be thrown over, he disappeared from the crowd. How much more, now that he is in heaven, would Jesus remain hidden from the world that knows him not, and rejects him when it cannot avoid seeing his works. The present state after his Ascension is one of faith; we “walk by faith and not by sight” (2 Cor 5:7). In heaven, all will be clear, all will be calm. The light of Christ will illuminate the city of God and warm each heart. But right now, clouds of can evil blot out our ability to see in the light of the divine sun, and a tempest can stir up our fears and threatens to sink us in a maelstrom of emotion. But God sees us, and His knowledge is one full of love.

There is a scene in the movie *A Princess Bride* that perfectly illustrates merely intellectual knowledge of someone’s sufferings. An evil count captures and tortures the hero Wesley on a terrible Machine and says,

“I’m sure you’ve discovered my deep and abiding interest in pain. At present, I’m writing the definitive work on the subject, so I want you to be totally honest with me on how The Machine makes you feel. ... What did this do to you? Tell me. And remember, this is for posterity, so be honest. How do you feel?”

In contrast, the knowledge of a friend is not cold and calculating, merely intellectual and devoid of the warmth of love. To the contrary, upon hearing of a friend’s suffering, we suffer too. Thus, when Christ sees our troubles, his seeing is a knowledge with love. On the divine level, this is because the Word of God is never separated from the Holy Spirit, who is the love of God: it is a Word continually breathing divine love.

Third, when Christ sees our trouble, he acts to save us. With his almighty power, God sustains all things in their being, but when He comes to us, he does so personally. He does not merely resolve our problem from afar; he wants to be near us; he wants us to be near him. His help is not merely an interior strengthening, but the gift of His own divine presence. How different that is from how the pagan gods were seen to help men. Virgil relates how Aeneas and his men cast into a terrible storm, meanwhile, the news filtered down to Neptune of the turmoil above.^[16]

In this scene, Neptune's physical distance from the storm is matched by an emotional distance from the men in danger. As he lifts his serene face from the waves, he commands the winds to return to their proper home and to bother the men no more: with his voice, he stills the storm: "Thus Neptune, and—no sooner said than done—he calmed the sea, chased off the massed clouds, and brought back the sun."^[17] But the closest Neptune comes to the men is to use his trident to lever their ships off of a reef. He never meets them face-to-face, because he does not love them.

Through the Incarnation, God shows us that He descends to our tempestuous times, and He comes to us in the flesh of Christ and He shares our troubles. Immune from all evil in the celestial kingdom, the Son of God assumed to himself human nature, taken from the Virgin Mary's womb, so that He might be close to us as a man and experience all that we suffer, except for sin itself.

Christ's coming down from the mountain and walking upon the waters toward the disciples in the storm is, therefore, an image of his earlier descent into our world: "for us men, and for our salvation, he came down from heaven." The abasement of God out of love for us is realised in Jesus Christ, who lowered himself into the pit of our world like a rescuer who, with ropes and pulleys, plunges down into a deep, dark cavern to save miners from their prison of perpetual night. Christ does not merely send someone else to help; nor does He help by stirring up His own power acting from a distance: Christ comes personally and says, "Take heart, it is I; have no fear" (Mt 14:27).

Fourth, Christ walks on the water toward us. Why does Christ walk? When a person is in an emergency, don't we run to help? Why didn't he immediately appear to them and stop the storm in a single moment of divine power? We could not endure a sudden stop to the terrors of our wild imaginations, any more than passengers can endure a sudden stop in a speeding car. When God walks toward us, with each step He takes, we are better able to discern his presence and come to realise that we are not alone, that "though the waters rage and foam ... The LORD of hosts is with us" (Ps 46:3). As St. John Chrysostom said, in walking toward the disciples, Christ teaches us not to seek a speedy riddance of evil, but to bear with patient courage such things that befall us. In the midst of turmoil, we expect immediate sunshine and calm waters. But the slowness of God's walking helps us realise that we are ultimately helpless without Him, and that only He is our saviour. To see the difficulty helps us grasp the greatness of his saving love.

We may also note that, though the disciples thought they were seeing a misty phantasm, Christ came to them in his very body. He wants to save them with his flesh and blood. By doing so, Christ gives the disciples the opportunity to cry out to him, so that they might be saved. Christ's action here is a supremely priestly act: he sacrifices his own safety in order to save others, which enables them to help others be saved. We can recognise in this instance a dim echo of the truth that the Son of God took flesh and came to earth, so that he might save us through his death; his death was a priestly sacrifice; and he extends his sacrifice through priestly hands in the holy mass. Christ does not save by taking control of the boat himself, as if he too were subject to troubled times. Christ does not merely guide them exteriorly, by explaining how to escape danger. Christ saves them by showing that wherever he is, there is peace and safety—even when the contrary seems to be the case.

In other words: Christ became a priest so that you could become a priest, so that you could bring him physically present to the Church in the Holy Eucharist; he wanted to save in a priestly way, so that he could extend his priesthood in you, and so that your priestly sacrifice, in turn, would be a chief means by which he saves the world. In sum, by allowing the disciples to endure the temporary wind and waves, but then by coming in his bodily presence, Christ showed them—and they in turn show us—that “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Rom 10:13).

My brother priests, let us never forget that at all costs it is necessary for us to come nearer to Christ in the intimacy of our hearts. We should fear nothing, for Christ is with us. If you have offended him, he is the pardon of God; if you have forgotten him, he remembers you; if you are in the darkness of a storm, he sees you, he comes to you, and he will raise you up again. He loves you with infinite tenderness, and he reaches out his hand to save you, to embrace you, to transform you into an alter Christus. Christ will encourage you, cure your wounds, dry your tears, heal your sores, strengthen your weak legs, and help you to once again walk on water.

[1] See Acts 27:43, which assumes that not all on the boat could swim.

[2] *Epistulae*, Book I, letter 4.

[3] *Epistulae*, Book I, letter 5. Gregory used the same imagery while writing his bishop friend Leander: “I am in this place tossed by such billows of this world that I am in no wise able to steer into port the old and rotten ship of which, in the hidden dispensation of God, I have assumed the guidance. Now in front the billows rush in, now at the side heaps of foamy sea swell up, now from behind the storm follows on. And, disquieted in the midst of all this, I am compelled sometimes to steer in the very face of the opposing waters; sometimes, turning the ship aside, to avoid the threats of the billows slantwise. I groan, because I feel that through my negligence the bilgewater of vices increases, and, as the storm meets the vessel violently, the rotten planks already sound of shipwreck. With tears I remember how I have lost the placid shore of my rest, and with sighs I behold the land which still, with the winds of affairs blowing against me, I cannot reach. If, then, you love me, dearest brother, stretch out to me in the midst of these billows the hand of your prayer; that from helping me in my labours you may, in very return for the benefit, be the stronger in your own.” Book I, letter 43.

[4] Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions*, trans. F.J. Sheed (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1943), 270-71, adapted for consistency.

[5] See Basil the Great, *Haxaameron*, hom. 4 no. 5: “Not only the water which was covering the earth flowed off from it, but all that which had filtered into its depths withdrew in obedience to the irresistible order of the sovereign Master. And it was so. This is quite enough to show that the Creator’s voice had effect.”

[6] J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: 50th Anniversary Edition: The Fellowship of the Ring* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2004), 51.

[7] See ST I-II, q. 100, art. 4.

[8] ST I-II, q. 113, art. 9, co.

[9] Matthias Scheeben, *The Glories of Divine Grace*, trans. Patrick O'Shaughnessy (Rockford, IL: TAN Books, 2000), 47.

[10] See John Wesley, "The Almost Christian," in *Sermons on Several Occasions* (London: The Epworth Press, 1950; org. 1787).

[11] For these titles and descriptions of charity, see ST II-II, q. 23, a. 8, ad 1-3 respectively. See my exposition on the effects of charity in *Habits and Holiness*, 399-401.

[12] <https://sacred-texts.com/egy/hh/hh060.htm>

[13] ST I-II, q. 109, a. 4, co.

[14] Aquinas, *Commentary on Romans*, c. 3, l. 3, n. 306.

[15] Homer, *Iliad*, trans. Richmond Lattimore (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2011), book 15, ll. 189-90.

[16] Virgil, *Aeneid*, trans. Stanley Lombardo (Indianapolis, IN; Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 2007), book I, ll. 105-9, 121-25, 137-8, 148. Line breaks removed.

[17] *Aeneid*, book I, ll. 170-3