

REMEMBER WHO YOUR STRENGTH IS

A reflection by Fr. Romano Guardini

“Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other shore while he sent away the crowds.” (Mt. 14:22) Jesus later came to the disciples by walking on the waters. They didn't recognize him and were frightened. Even when he spoke to them they weren't sure, so Peter asked for a kind of proof. To us this seems mad, because if it isn't Jesus the “proof” could be fatal. But what we need to think about is how Jesus calls to us to follow him, even when that seems crazy or mortally dangerous. Are you ready to leave your security behind and step into pure trust in Jesus?

Jesus calls: Come! Peter fixed his eyes on Jesus and steps overboard. The water bears his weight! He believes, and more he shares what Christ is, not just what Christ does. Jesus' act has become Peter's. But that doesn't prevent Peter from becoming aware that the water supporting him is rising and falling and we know how hard it is to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus when we are in dangerous situations. If you hear the roar of the wind and feel the very surface beneath your feet rock you are likely to find yourself in crisis. Will you think of your human inability to do what you find yourself doing? Will you keep your attention fixed on Jesus and not on yourself or your situation?

Peter had come to a moment of crisis. Instead of leaning more completely on the support of Jesus and on faith in Jesus Peter began to look at his danger and his weakness, and he began to sink. The only thing he could do was scream out: *“Lord! Save me!”* He turned to Jesus and Jesus reached out and took his hand. All of a sudden the water was solid under his feet.

This passage contains a most important revelation about faith. What we experience when we believe isn't a truth or a value but a reality. It is the reality of God come to us in the living Christ. In the midst our world and way of experiencing, a door opens into a reality that is not simply of this world. We can step through that door into a place, a room and a power on which we can lean when our strength and wisdom run out. We find ourselves with one we can lean on no matter what. We find ourselves supported by a love to which we are called to give ourselves wholly. Faith is the act of giving ourselves, of building our living on a Divine Power, letting it make us part of its acting in us and so in our world.

CHRIST'S LOVE CALMS INNER STORMS

A reflection beginning from a sermon by St. Augustine

The Gospels tell us a story about Christ, the Lord, walking on the waters of a sea and how the apostle Peter found he could do the same as long as he turned away from his fears and entrusted himself to the Lord. Think of yourself challenged to give your life for another as Fr. Maximilian Kolbe was. He saw a man, the father and sole support of a family, chosen out by the guards of a concentration camp to die as a way of terrifying other prisoners into obedience. He thought of the man's family and how it needed him and then he stepped forward and asked to be allowed to die in the man's place.

He did what Peter did when he stepped out of a boat and onto fiercely agitated waters in the midst of a storm. He did it trusting in Jesus. He had to keep his heart fixed on Jesus' love, for him and for the man he was dying for. He had to ignore all the agitation going on in himself, all his fears about what was going to happen to him. The Nazi guards were going to lock him in a small room and let him starve to death—no food and no water and no support, except from Jesus.

When we consider Peter and Maximilian as representative members of the Church we have to distinguish what they did by God's power and what was attributable to them as human individuals. We have to do that too, or we will falter when we have to face and cope with all the storms that agitate us from within—temptations and fears and uncertainties. One moment you are all confidence and the next you can only think of your uncertainties and your doubts. At one moment you place all your faith in God and at the next moment you can only think that your life is in danger.

“Lord, if you are leading me, command me to come to you on the waters!” So you climb out of your boat and begin to walk toward Jesus using the very power of Jesus. But think of your human frailty! “Lord, I'm drowning!” Have you ever had to cry out like that? If you love God, and think only of God's love for you, then you will find you have power to overcome yourself. If you can do that you can overcome the world. If you think of your power then the world will swallow you up. Can you refuse to become a prey to doubt and accept that you are losing control? The One who died for your sake will reach out and take your hand, leading you even through the death you have to endure for love of God and other weak human beings. Trust in the One who never fails, and gives you the power to trust without ever running away!

REJOICE IN GOD'S GIFT

A reflection developed from a sermon by St. Bernard

“The mighty One has done great things to me and has exalted the humble.” (Lk.9:39) Today the glorious Virgin Mary has been taken up into heaven. Surely this fills up the measure of joy for all. How could we weep because we lose her when we have no abiding city here? We seek the very city to which Blessed Mary has gone. If we are registered on the rolls of citizenship of God's Heavenly Kingdom then we too should share the joy of our fellow citizens—even in our exile here by the waters of Babylon. We confidently follow her, crying out: “Draw us after you! Let us run toward the fragrance of your perfumes!” We who are in exile have sent on ahead of us an advocate, the very mother of mercy. She will humbly but effectively look after everything that concerns our salvation.

Today, earth returns to Heaven one of its most precious gifts. It is by giving and receiving within the blessed bonds of friendship that the human is wedded to the divine, earth to heaven, and the depths united to the heights. A sublime fruit of the earth has gone up to heaven from whence every good and best gift descends. The Blessed Virgin has been taken up on high so that she may continue to give us the greatest gift. Surely she doesn't lack the will to keep giving, nor can she lack the ability unless the only begotten Son has ceased to honor his mother. Love itself was born of God and rested nine months in her womb. This evokes a response of love in our hearts.

Yet the benefits that may come to us are not what are most important. We rejoice because of what God has done for his own glory. Can we be without gratitude to God and to her? In her God has shown us the way of grace. In Jesus humankind shares the very throne of God, and Jesus has chosen to share it with Mary, his mother. In her we see the glory that God wishes to share with each of us. Each of us is meant to manifest another facet of that glory. As Mary surpassed in grace all others on earth so in heaven her glory is unique. Indeed, eye has not seen nor ear heard nor the human mind conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him. So who can express what he has prepared for the woman who bore him in her womb and gave him birth and loved him above more than all others? Blessed indeed is Mary, blessed in ways beyond our counting. In her we are called to a like blessedness. How can we not rejoice with great joy on this day when we are reminded that God has taken her up to glory without end and so begun to show us what he holds in store for us all?!

THE GIFT OF A NEW YOUTH

A reflection developed from a sermon by St. Maximus of Turin

Those who live in sin are enfeebled; they can't live the fullness of life God intends for all of us to live. But the grace of justification makes a person young again. It causes us to be reborn into a sinless state, and this is so even if one is already enfeebled by physical old age. Through baptism we see even old people become babes again because we see them begin to live with new vigor and do wondrous works of love. The grace of God causes one to cease to be what one was before, and then become what human beings were intended to be before sin came into the world. Such people have rid themselves of the blemishes of passing years: St. Paul says, "Put off the old person and the deeds of sin and put on a new person, renewed in the image of our creator."

In one of the psalms we are told "your youth will be renewed like an eagle's". The eagle is said to prolong its life by pulling out its old and worn feathers so it can grow new ones. It discards what is worn with age and clothes itself in a mantle of youthful freshness so it can once again soar to great heights. With the growth of the new feathers the old bird becomes an eaglet again. This happens to eagles only in fables but something very like it happens in reality to those who give themselves to God in Christ.

The words of the psalmist as just quoted are a kind of prophecy of the grace of baptism and of the life of renewal that we live when we walk in the grace of that sacrament. The sins and failings of the past have vanished, leaving a renewal of youth's unimpaired vigor. Some think this prophecy is only realized in the resurrection. But that is not so. It is renewed whenever a person begins to live in the grace of divine love. The Virgin Mary showed us what such a life is like, and many saints and holy persons have followed her by giving their lives in love of God and of the many others whom they found to be in various kinds of need.

In baptism we put on Christ. We put on his love and that brings his life. This love gradually renews our life as we live it more and more fully. We will only see the utter fullness of this in Heaven but we begin to see it as we live like Christ on this earth. God means us to walk in confidence and trust. He gives us clear knowledge that we have been renewed in grace by the love we find in our hearts. Walk in this love all the way to Heaven.

OUR MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION

A reflection taken from St. Cyril's Commentary on Second Corinthians

Those who have been born in the Spirit have a sure hope that they will live forever in Christ and in glory. They have taken hold of a future life even now in the present world. Such persons say, "Outward appearances are no longer my standard of what is good or in judging anything. My life is in the Spirit and is guided by the Spirit." The light of the Only Begotten has shown upon us and we are being transformed as though we had re-entered our mother's womb to be born as a new creature. Now the bonds of death and the fear of death no longer hold us or control us but we have been set free from our former condition.

Through the Heavenly Father's will and grace the mystery of incarnation has been revealed to us. For our sake the Only Begotten Son became human and put an end to our misunderstanding of death. Through Christ we have gained access to the Heavenly Father. There is no other path to the fullness of life. What is more, "It is God who has reconciled us to himself through Christ, and who has given us a ministry of reconciliation." Our new life is a ministering of God's love so all can be reconciled and enter life in its fullness.

None of us lives simply in the flesh anymore. We live and understand our lives and selves in a new way. As St. Paul taught us, "Once we thought of Christ as being in the flesh but we do so no longer". We know Christ in the divine love he lived and the works of that love. It is a love impossible to the flesh but given us in God's grace. Christ himself passed through death, but "*having died once he he will never die again; death has no more power over him any longer. His death was a death to sin, which he died once for all. His life is life with God*". What he is we are to become and by the same path of loving service. This is our joy, a joy no work of the flesh can give.

Since Christ has in this way become the source of life for us, we who follow in Christ's footsteps must not think of ourselves as merely living in the flesh. We have passed beyond it. In us Christ is conceived and is growing until he is fully formed in us and we become other Christs. That is what we must lead others to by our ministry of reconciling them to God but showing them what it means to say that God is love. "When people are in Christ they become completely different; their old life is over and a new life has begun." These aren't my words but those of St. Paul and God's Spirit. As Christ was born of Mary to save us all, so Christ must be born in us for the salvation of many. Believe and you will be transformed into the minister of life and reconciliation to which God has called you.

THE MINISTRY OF PARADISE

A reflection developed from a sermon by St. Pope Leo the Great

The Book of Genesis declares that God's call to our race was to be the gardeners and caretakers of a paradise. We refused that call and so have made the earth anything but a paradise. In Christ we have accepted that vocation and he showed us by his Ascension that we are to care for a new and heavenly Paradise. We no longer need struggle with death but are given an everlasting vocation to the cultivation and perfecting of all created life. We are invited to raise our hopes to that place where our Head has entered before us. We are confirmed in the possession of paradise but a Heavenly one. In Christ we have entered into the heaven of heavens and gained more through Christ's all-surpassing grace than we had lost through sin. Through the devil's malice we caused ourselves to be driven from the happiness of the original paradise and even from our own bodies in death. Now God takes us to himself in Christ and shows us in the saints and holy ones.

We are now immortal because we are now members of Christ's body and sharers of his immortality. The blessed company of disciples and apostles received a great and inexpressible cause for joy when they saw human nature rising above the dignity of the whole of creation. There was no limit to its upward course until it was admitted to a seat at the right hand of the eternal Father and enthroned in glory of the Only Begotten Son born of the Virgin Mary.

What God gave to Christ by raising him to his right hand is done also for us in and through Him. Let us rejoice with great joy at such a gift and at our restoration to our vocation as ministers of life and life in its fullness. It is this life that creates and recreates Paradise. You see the marvelous Plan of God that was worked through the Virgin Mary's response to her vocation and you can see in her our own vocation. As the loving Christ is born through our deeds of loving service and mercy so we lead all back to Paradise but in a new and more wonderful form. God never takes back his gifts, including the gift of vocation given so long ago to our race. Take hold of that gift and never let it go. Take hold of it and never let fear overcome you. The task may seem impossible but for God all things are possible. It would have been thought impossible for God to become human while remaining God if this had not been accomplished in Christ. You are now called, as the Virgin Mary was, to serve as the door through which all things are restored and even raised beyond what they were before. Rejoice in the Lord always and let your light shine before all. It is the Light of Christ and your ministry of restoring all to Paradise is that of Christ.

FINDING REST IN GOD

A reflection taken from a sermon by Guerric of Igny

In the Book of Wisdom we hear the words, “in everything I sought rest”. We have just celebrated the rest of God’s holy Mother and from it we draw a greater love for the gift of eternal rest. This rest is the fruit of our labors. They are the seed and eternal rest is the harvest. It is in the shade of Jesus’ wings that we will find rest for our souls and firm support. When meditation on eternal rest casts its shadow on those who toil it brings refreshment, fresh strength and new spirit for work.

The words with which we began were those of Wisdom, the Church, and Mary. She, like any faithful person, sought rest through all her deeds. She has found it after many trials and turmoils. The one who created her found rest in the tent of her body and has not refused her the rest that is Heaven. He wishes to share all with you, as he shared in one flesh and in one spirit in the mystery of love and unity with his mother. Happy is she in the arms of her bridegroom as he dwells in the inner chamber of her heart. Blessed those in whom God has found rest, even if only for an hour. Unless He finds in us the rest He is seeking we shall not find in Him the rest we long for.

Through the prophet the Lord says, “This is my rest, that you should restore the weary”. Blessed are they who attend the needy and poor. The Lord will do the same for them and give them rest and refreshment. With whom shall I rest, he says, if not with the humble and the quiet and the one who reverences my words? I sought this in all but found it in a humble servant. No one was found like her in the grace of humility. Indeed, how should anything rest upon the restless? And who but the humble can be quiet and stable? How can we be such persons too? He says, Attend to your own business and work with your hands. Listen to the Apostle Paul: “We are told that there are among you those who are restless and live in idleness”. If we are like that let us be ashamed, realizing that we are missing the only path to genuine rest. Isaiah counsels us, “If you turn back and become quiet you will be saved”.

Let us all together make a point of being quiet and at peace. Let us always be occupied with meditation on eternal rest and quiet. May the Blessed Mother of God, whose rest we have celebrated, obtain this for us by her prayers. May we imitate her in whom God found rest. Jesus Christ is eternal rest. May we become one with him even as he made himself one with Blessed Mary.