

19. How can we walk on the waters?

I always think back to the episode in which my holy patron Maurus, obeying St. Benedict, manages to walk on the waters of the lake to save the life of little Placid. Right afterward, Maurus looks behind himself and is almost frightened of what has happened. St. Gregory the Great writes: "As soon as he put his feet back on ground, he came to himself, looked around, and realized he had run over the waters, and, full of fear, he marveled that what he would never have presumed to do actually had happened" (*Dialogues* 2:7).

I always rejoice and find comfort when I meet older people who express the same awe when they look at the path of their life in the monastery, in their family, in every type of vocation and mission. They recognize that the merit for it all goes to the Lord of the impossible, who not only calls us but also, in spite of everything, with infinite patience brings to completion the journey of our vocation and mission.

What is our merit? What is our contribution to this miracle?

The episode of St. Maurus helps us understand that the human being's whole merit is that of obedience with trust, or better: *trusting to the point of obedience*. One could say that *obedience is the incarnation of trust*, of the freedom that one trusts in. And in this, obedience becomes like the driving force of the conversion of life about which we were speaking with regard to *conversatio morum*. St. Maurus made an impossible journey by running on the path of obedience. He walked on the waters, borne up not by the waters but by obedience, that which, as we have seen, "considers nothing more precious than Christ" (RB 5:2). That is, when he walked on the waters he was carried, sustained, by the love of Christ. Like St. Peter, moreover, when he walked on the sea to get to Jesus who was telling him: "Come!" (Mt 14:29).

We should read the episode of St. Peter walking on the waters, as if to follow Jesus at every cost, as a parable of life as vocation and of how it is possible to be faithful until the very end, without fear, even if many times we sink for lack of faith.

In the middle of the stormy sea, Jesus comes to meet us and tells us: "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid" (Mt 14:27). Each of us hears these words in his own heart when we perceive our vocation to follow Jesus. Every vocation begins with listening to Jesus who, in a thousand ways, tells us: "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." Peter hears this call, and therefore he is right to ask Jesus: "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water" (v. 28). We respond to Christ's call because he draws us to himself. The problem is not what road to take, whether it is on the water or in the air, or on who knows what else. At times it is much harder to walk on earth, in our community, through the circumstances of life, than to walk on water. The important thing is that we walk to follow Jesus, with our eyes and our heart fixed on his presence, drawn by the sweetness of his love, which continuously comforts us: "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid."

We lack faith, like Peter – “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” (v. 31) – when we pretend to have strength and energy for following Christ other than his very person, present to watch and love us. Faith means obtaining from Christ himself all the courage, strength, light, peace, joy that we need to follow him, that we need to live out all the vows and commitments of our vocation.

Only this faith allows us to be faithful to our vocation, only this trust, nurtured by Jesus himself who gives us the Holy Spirit and his own trust in the Father, allows us to live out the vows and commitments of our vocation with delight and fruitfulness. Only this faith brings us to live out our vocation with awe, with wonder, because we are always witnesses of what God does, of the impossible that God makes happen in us and around us, contrary to every human hope.

However, and it is essential to understand and live this, it is indispensable that, to live out our vocation, vows, the conversion that is asked of us, through all the trials of life, it is indispensable to understand and experience that what permits us to make this journey on the waters is Jesus alone, who calls us, watches us, comforts us.

Imagine our vocation as if we found ourselves effectively on a boat or on the shore. And see that Jesus appears on foot in the waters of the sea. He tells us he is not a ghost, but that it is really Him. He encourages us not to fear and tells us: “Come!” This means that our whole vocation asks us to get ourselves walking on the waters, otherwise we do not follow Jesus, we do not walk with Him. So we look at the water, which on top of everything is a bit troubled. And we ask ourselves: but how will it be possible for me to walk on the waters? How will it be possible for me to follow my vocation, which, as far as concerns the monastic vocation, means I live in a community, obey superiors, live stably in a monastery, renounce having a family, detach myself from all my goods, get up early in the morning to pray, etc.? What will enable me to walk on these waters? Maybe the shape of my feet? Or the weight of my body? Or perhaps certain types of observances, of monastic and liturgical forms? Maybe let’s give it a try. Before putting my foot in the water, I try praying in Latin. But the foot sinks and this is not what makes me walk on the water. So then I try to pray in the vernacular, maybe with guitar and drums. But neither does this make me walk on the water. I take communion on the tongue kneeling, and I do not walk on the water; I take it my hand, standing, and do not walk on the water. So then maybe it is my habit that can help me. I put on my hood, but I do not walk on the water. I take off my hood and do not walk on the water. For the nuns: I put on my veil, I take off my veil; I try putting on a wimple and then I take it off. But in no case does this help me walk on water. Maybe it is the type of observance that can help me. I try to follow a very monastic observance, with a lot of cloister, continual silence, three hours a day of *lectio divina*, long periods of adoration, manual labor... But all of this does not make me walk on water. So then I try to be more open, to never have silence, to do pastoral work, in schools and parishes, and to go out on every occasion. But I put my foot in the water and even all this fails to make me walk

on the sea. Finally, I try them all, all the styles, all the tendencies, all the practices and methods possible, all the observances, strict, medium, broad... and none of this, on its own, allows me to walk on the waters, that is, to follow the vocation to which Jesus calls me.

In the end, exasperated, on the point of leaving everything and refusing to walk on the waters, because it is impossible anyway, in the end I lift my eyes and realize that Jesus is still there, in the middle of the stormy sea, he looks at me, he loves me, smiles and repeats: "Come!" And as if distracted by this gaze, by this love, without thinking about it, instinctively, like a young man in love, I go towards Him, I let myself be drawn by Him alone, without thinking about my feet, or the water, or the observances. And then, a miracle! Without realizing it I am walking on the waters! I am advancing in my vocation! I am being converted to holiness! My heart is expanding with love for God and brother!

Then I understand that all the observances, practices, missions, styles of monastic life, it is all good and is of service to the vocation and sanctifies us only if it helps me realize that Jesus is there to look at me and call me, to comfort me and, stirring my love, make the impossible journey possible, following him toward eternal life, in the bosom of the Father!