

**COMMAND ME TO COME TO YOU ON THE WATER – Biblical Commentary by F. Alberto Maggi  
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**Mt 14.22-33**

*Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them. <sup>25</sup> And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea.*

*But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" and they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." And Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus.*

*But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me." Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."*

Jesus' message is a universal message. He did not come to restore the kingdom of Israel, but to introduce the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God means that his universal love, not only for the proportionality, but for the quality, is for everyone. And therefore Jesus wants to communicate this love also to the pagans, but finds resistance amongst the disciples.

It is what Matthew writes in chapter 14,22-23. "*Immediately..*", that would be straight away after the division of the loaves, "*..he made.....*", Jesus must force the disciples do something that they do not want to do, "*... get into the boat..*", the boat is the image of the Christian community, "*...and go before him to the other side...*" Here is why He must force them. The other side, the oriental side of lake Tiberius, is the land of the pagans, and the disciples do not want to know about going to the pagans, and above all they do not want that the episode of the division of the loaves, in which Jesus had anticipated the making of Himself into bread, the food of life for all His people, would be spread also to the pagans.

*“And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain..”*, the mountain does not indicate or represent the mountain of the beatitudes, where Jesus announced His message *“..by himself..”*. ‘By himself’ is a term used by the evangelist that always indicates resistance, hostility on the part of the disciples. *“..to pray.”* Jesus in Matthew’s Gospel, prays only twice: here and at Gethsemane and always in a moment of crisis of His own group.

*“When evening came,..”* the indication was already given and therefore superfluous, but the evangelist wants to recall the effect of the Lord’s supper, *“... he was there alone..”*.As Jesus will be alone at Gethsemane, He will be alone here, the disciples accompany Him but they do not follow Him. *“..the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them.”*

What is this wind? The word wind in the phrase will appear a good three times, therefore it means totality. The wind was against them, therefore it represents the resistance of the disciples, that do not want to know of going to the pagans. They are thinking of the supremacy of Israel over the pagan population and do not think to go and serve the pagan population. So the wind is against them.

*“And in the fourth watch of the night..”* God is with whom rescues at the break of dawn.... *“..he came to them, walking on the sea.”*The indication is precious because in the book of Job it says the God is the only one, the only one that walks on the sea. The sea indicated chaos, that which was impossible for mankind to dominate, the only one able to walk on the sea was God. Therefore the evangelist wants to say that Jesus demonstrates His divine condition.

*“But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, “It is a ghost!” and they cried out in fear.”*Why is this? Because for the disciples, that had not yet understood who Jesus is, it is impossible for a man to have the divine condition. They thought that Jesus was sent by God, a prophet, but that Jesus was God, they had not yet understood.

Therefore thinking that it was a spirit because it is impossible for a man to have the divine condition. God was so distant from mankind that to imagine that one could manifest in a human being for them it was inconceivable. *“But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, “ I am,”* is the name of God, it is the name with which God had replied to Moses in the famous episode of the burning bush and in the book of Deuteronomy.

Therefore Jesus confirms His divine condition *“«Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid. »”*

*“Peter..”*, that is Simon Peter presented with his negative nickname that means one who is doing something contrary to Jesus, *“...answered him, «Lord, if it is you...»”*, exactly like the devil in the desert *“ If you are the son of God.”* Peter begins his activity as tempter of Jesus, of Satan, he will be the only disciple that Jesus will nominate *“Satan”, “ Get behind me Satan!”*

And Peter challenges and tempts Him, *“Lord, if it is you..”* exactly as the devil in the desert, *“«... command me to come to you on the water. »”*.He wants the divine condition, but thinks this comes with an imposition from on high. Jesus invites him, Peter begins to walk on the water, *“But when he saw the wind..”*, the strong wind is that which Jesus in the parable of the house built on rocks signifies the

normal difficulties that come to a believer during his life, but if the house has strong foundations, it remains safe.

If it is constructed on sand it crumbles. So then Peter had constructed his house on sand. Therefore seeing the difficulties, "*.. he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, «Lord, save me. »*" Jesus had called Simone to be fishers of men and he is the only one to be fished for! In fact *Jesus*"... *immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, «O you of little faith, why did you doubt? »*" Peter is the only one to merit twice this rebuke "*O you of little faith*".

Therefore for he who had been called to be a fisher of men had to be fished by Jesus. "*And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased.*", when there is the presence of Jesus in the community and it is He that guides, leads the community, the hostility ceases.

"*And those in the boat worshiped him,..*" they recognize the divine condition in Him, and say "*Truly you are the Son of God.*" It is not the son of God waited for in the tradition, the violent messiah, the judge, but God's son, a new way for God to manifest himself completely, that will be finally known by the disciples here and also by the soldiers at the moment of Jesus' resurrection.