

COMMAND ME TO COME TO YOU ON THE WATER – Biblical commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

Matthew 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. 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."

Gods' universal love for everyone, that Jesus came to manifest with his life and message, finds a real resistance in his disciples, that do not accept God's love for all humanity, including gentiles, they think that it is only for Israel.

This is what Matthew writes in his gospel at chapter 14,22: "*Immediately..*" after the division of the bread and fishes in the land of Israel "*..he made..*" why should Jesus force his disciples? Because he goes against their resistance, they do not want to know, he must force them, and to do what? "*..get into the boat..*" the boat is the image of the Christian community, therefore the church "*..and go before him..*" now we understand why the resistance "*.. to the other side,*" When, in the gospel we find *to the other side*, it always indicates the eastern shore of Lake Galilee, that is, the land of the gentiles. Every time that Jesus asks them or pushes them to go to the land of the gentiles, there is always an incident. "*..while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain..*" 'the' mountain indicating the mount of the Beatifications, where Jesus had announced the message of the universal love. "*.. by himself ..*" this expression, when used by the evangelists indicates that there is resistance, opposition or misunderstanding on the part of the disciples. "*..to pray.*" It is the first time that Jesus prays, there are two times in this gospel that Jesus prays and always in times of difficulty and danger for his disciples, here and in Gethsemane.

"*..evening came,..*" it's strange that the evangelist repeats what has already been said in a couple of verses before, verse 15, why does he say this? "evening came" it is the same phrase that indicates Jesus' Last Supper; therefore this universal love that Jesus had manifested with the gift of himself for all humanity. "*..he was there alone,*" the disciples are not with him, the crowd has dispersed, but the evangelist underlines a solitude not only physical but spiritual of Jesus. 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.*" This wind is the resistance of the disciples to Jesus' asking them to go into the land of the Gentiles. They do not want to know, they do not want to know of taking this universal love into gentile land, where Jesus will again share the loaves, they think that this should be and remain a privilege of Israel. That is why the wind was contrary, they are the same disciples.

"And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea." Why does the evangelist write that Jesus walked on water? The sea was an image of chaos and only God had the power to dominate it; in the book of Job, God walks on the waves of the sea. So, walking on water indicates the manifestation of the divine condition, the fullness of the divine condition on the behalf of Jesus. *" But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea,"* seeing Jesus' divine condition *"..they were terrified,"* Why? Because religion had made a separation between God, distant, inaccessible, to man; It was unthinkable and unimaginable that God could manifest himself in a man and that a man might have the divine condition, and for this *"said, "It is a ghost!"* So it is impossible for them that a man may also be God *"and they cried out in fear."* But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, *"Take heart; it is I..."* Jesus saying this and the answer that God had given to Moses in the famous episode of the burning bush, claims the fullness of the divine condition *"Do not be afraid."*

"And Peter answered him," this disciple is presented only by his negative nickname, which indicates his stubbornness, therefore it is understood that he is doing something that is not in tune with Jesus *" Lord, if it is you,"* Exactly like the devil in the desert "if it is you", Peter takes on the role of the tempter Satan and Jesus later on will scold him calling him Satan. *"...command me to come to you on the water."* Peter also wants the divine condition. *"He said, "Come."* The divine condition is not exclusive to Jesus, but it is for all those that welcome him.

"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.." Why does the evangelist tell us this? Jesus at the end of his talk on the mountain, where he had announced God's universal love for all humanity, had spoken of a house built on sand; when strong winds and rain arrived the house collapsed, this because the words had not made roots in the people, so this figure of Peter, this is the sinking, the collapse. *"...he cried out, "Lord, save me."* Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him... It is interesting that he had called Simon that had been called to be fishers of men, when it is he that needs to be fished, *"...saying to him, "O you of little faith,..."* it is the second time that Jesus must reprove for the lack of faith. *"..why did you doubt?"* Peter thought the divine condition came from a divine command, the divine condition is obtained only through persecution and opposition, and often the sacrifice of one's life.

"And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased." This contrary spirit, as soon as the community welcomes Jesus, ceases. *"And those in the boat worshiped him,..."* We will find this expression on the mountain of the Resurrection, which is the very mountain of the Beatitudes, where the disciples experienced Jesus resurrected, *"..saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."*, Jesus is the son of God, an entirely new way of manifesting God and his son-ship, what is it? That of a universal love from which no one can be excluded.