

## IN CHRIST'S BOAT

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In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. My Lord and my God, I firmly believe that you are here, that you see me, that you hear me. I adore you with profound reverence. I ask you for pardon of my sins and grace to make this time of prayer fruitful. My Mother Immaculate, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.

As we enter into this period of prayer together, we- we begin, perhaps, by praying for one another, that we would have the gift of prayer. We ask the Holy Spirit to grant us this great gift, that we will be able to open our souls, our hearts, our minds, our whole being to the Lord, to you, Jesus. And we can contemplate the Lord, you, Lord Jesus, in the fifth chapter of Luke's Gospel, in the hustle and bustle, in the busyness of your public life. We see you here so often, in fact, surrounded by crowds, by the Sea of Galilee, we picture ourselves there. More than that, we situate ourselves there on the shores of that lake where you teach us so often.

And St. Luke recounts that, "While that people pressed upon him to hear the Word of God, he was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat."

Here we are, Lord Jesus, assembled along the shore, listening to you a little bit out from the shore, as you speak to us. Perhaps we can see how the crowd arranges itself, sits down, strains our hearing to listen carefully to what you have to say. Perhaps the children, the sick, the hard of hearing are in the front. And there we are listening to you, the Teacher- Teacher with a capital *T*. And we ask you now, Lord, in this period of mental prayer of meditation, to teach us- to teach us, we could say, from the bottom of our heart, with the words of Scripture we can say to you, Lord, "Speak Lord, your servant is listening. You have the message of eternal life." Or we could say with those words of St. Josemaria that he learned from his grandmother when he was a child, "Yours am I. I was born for thee. What is it, oh Jesus, you want of me?" It's a great disposition to nurture in our souls, in our- in these times of prayer, like now, to listen wholeheartedly with all our soul to the words of eternal life, the only word that gives full meaning with a capital *M*.

Ven. Francis Libermann, an admirable holy saint, a venerable, a Frenchman who died in 1852, he has a beautiful image of our being docile, our being open to the Holy Spirit, to the voice of God. And he expresses it in terms of a feather floating in the air, floating in the wind, that just like that feather is

light and movable and susceptible to the breath of the wind, you and I would be susceptible, open to the breath of the Holy Spirit. In fact, Ven. Francis Libermann has a very admirable life. Born in France, the son of a rabbi, with great regard for his Jewish faith, initially thought of being a rabbi himself. Then he went through a difficult period of agnosticism, suffered a lot, questions of faith, and then eventually, he came into the Church and the Lord called him, in due course, to be a priest and the founder of a missionary congregation. In fact, he's regarded as the second founder of the Spiritans, or of the Holy Ghost Fathers.

But again, we can see in this saint, it's just one example of someone who has been declared venerable by the Church, that openness to God, that listening to God which led him through many different phases in his life and made his life extraordinarily fruitful. That image maybe can- can help us, we're like a feather, susceptible to the breathing of the Holy Spirit, to the love of God, to the word of Christ addressed to us from the boat.

You, Lord Jesus, you teach us from the boat, and you are the teacher of all teachers. There is no teacher like you, Lord. As we hear in the Gospel of John, "no man ever spoke like this man." And it's true, because you are the Word with a capital W, you are the Word of Life, as St. John says. You are the word that fills my life with with significance, with meaning, with eternity. Elsewhere in the gospel we hear, Lord, that you teach with authority. That doesn't mean arrogance or harshness, but rather that you teach with substance because you are God. And besides that, Lord, you are the greatest teacher because what you teach is the supreme lesson - eternal life, true humanity, fullness of love. We could think of St. Peter, after that outstanding episode in the synagogue of Capernaum where you, Lord, announce yourself as the Bread of Life, that shocking, amazing, incredibly beautiful teaching, when some people no longer can bear to follow you anymore, they can't take it anymore, it's just too much. So we're told many no longer went with you after that discourse of the Bread of Life. But St. Peter says, "But Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." And we could also make that profession of faith if we wish now in this prayer. Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. So, it is good in our prayer, like now, to dispose ourselves, to listen, to be attentive. I suppose, to take inspiration from that prayer, that little, powerful prayer of St. Josemaria: "Yours am I. I was born for thee. What is it, oh Jesus, you want of me?"

Here we are by the Sea of Galilee, listening to the words of the Teacher who speaks from the boat of Peter. And along with the whole of Christian tradition, of course, we can see in the back of the boat of St. Peter, an image of the Church, the people of God, making its pilgrim way through this world. The world is symbolized by the sea. Or we might say the sea symbolizes history with all its ups and downs, with its calm moments and when its- and with its storms, and its squalls. And here, we take a moment to pray about and for the Church, and to renew our profound love for the Church. The boat is the boat of St. Peter in which Christ dwells. You, Lord Jesus, you are the very self of the

Church and the Holy Spirit is the soul of the Church. Lord, may I never, ever weaken in my faith and love for the Church.

Sometimes it's true- the Church in a given period or in a given place can seem a bit battered or weary or- or bedraggled, or even wounded by my sins, by our sins. Yet we know through faith that the Church is your loving and living presence, somehow the extension of your personality. Through history, the Church is nothing less than that. And she contains, despite her apparent weakness at times, she contains all the saving power of God. And that is why we love the Church and that is why we keep faith in the Church, even when she is suffering, even if she's being battered by high and violent waves, or when she has leaks from inside from my sins, from your sins, from the weaknesses of the members of the Church. Nonetheless, the Church is the living presence of Christ in the world. I believe in my mother, the holy Church.

Of course, too, we pray for the Holy Father, Peter, it's his boat we're in after all. We don't see ourselves as detached onlookers into the life of the Church. We're in that boat with Peter, *omnis cum petro ideism permerium*, always, all together with Peter, traveling together to Jesus, through Mary. And that phrase, of course, is one of those lapidary phrases that explains the spirit of Opus Dei and the spirit of St. Josemaria, *all together with Peter, to Jesus through Mary*. So, in this moment of our prayer too, as we meditate on this Gospel passage, let us embrace with our prayer the whole Church, especially perhaps those parts of the Church which are suffering in some way, brothers and sisters of ours who are persecuted for their faith, or who suffer poverty or war, or those brothers and sisters who are weak because they haven't received a good catechesis and don't have a good knowledge of the Lord and yet they are members of the Church. And when we pray for the Church, we do well to pray for ourselves, living members of the Church who have so much growing to do as well.

To meditate on this Gospel, which is in fact, the Gospel scene for the Mass of St. Josemaria, Luke 5:1-11, we turn now to the intercession of St. Josemaria. We know, in fact, that the saints always do accompany us in our prayer. But I'm thinking that given this is the gospel of the Mass of St. Josemaria, we do well to go to his intercession in a particular way, and in fact, we ask St. Josemaria now to guide us in our prayer, drawing on this homily which we are studying together, are praying about together, in this mini-series on *The Richness of Ordinary Life*, that wonderful homily which we find in the collection, *Friends of God*. St. Josemaria, preaching there, or praying there, says, "Like Our Lord, I too am fond of talking about fishing boats and nets so that we may all draw clear and decisive resolutions from the gospel scenes. St. Luke tells us of some fishermen washing and mending their nets by the shores of Lake Gennesaret. Jesus comes up to the boats tied up alongside and goes into one of them, which is Simon's. How naturally the master comes aboard our own boat. Just to complicate our lives, you hurt- you hear some people complain. You and I know better. We know that Our Lord has crossed our paths to complicate our existence with gentleness and love."

We see here how St. Josemaria contemplates you, Lord, as you- you make your own, that boat of Peter, he's busy in the corner, washing the nets, and you just make yourself at home in his boat. And perhaps this is the fundamental idea we can focus on in our meditation, that you, Lord, want to enter into my boat, our boat, you want to enter into our lives, and that is precisely what gives our lives its richness - the richness of ordinary life is the beauty of the presence of Christ in the ordinary. God does not live in splendid isolation. God seeks communion, union, conversation, love with us. He wants to be part of our lives and he wants our lives to be part of his. In some ways that's the definition of divine grace, isn't it? God's life in us to live the life of God. We see this, of course, throughout the history of salvation. It's always nice to reread the document of the Second Vatican Council on divine revelation, *Dei Verbum*, the Word of God, because it talks very beautifully about how God wants to share this communion of life with us, and that's why he reveals himself progressively. But you, Lord, you don't just reveal yourself, you come to us, you seek us out, you want to live with us.

In his very good book called *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist*, Brad Petri traces the presence of God, how God seeks to be present to his people throughout the Old Covenant. I suppose he does this to prepare us for explaining Christ as the new temple, new presence of God among us in the Eucharist. But Petri looks at how, in the Old Covenant, God is always close to his people. In the time of the patriarchs, there is no central place for acts of worship, but the Lord dialogues with his people through the patriarchs, wherever they may be. And then at the time of the Exodus of the twelve tribes out of Egypt, they built a portable tabernacle, the so-called tabernacle of Moses, which contained the Holy of Holies, which in turn contained the golden Ark of the Covenant. It was, in a sense, the most close presence of God to the people. This was, in effect, it was a portable tent which they carried with them the presence of God. God wants to dwell among his people who were on a move- were on the move.

Subsequently, there's the great temple of Solomon built in Jerusalem around 1000 BC. And this was a stone, a magnificent structure, covered with gold and decorated with variegated carvings. Sadly, it was destroyed in 587 BC by the Babylonian invasion and that led to the Babylonian exile. But then, about 50 years later, King Cyrus of Persia allows the Jews to return to their land and he gives permission for them again to build a temple. This is the so called Second Temple which wasn't at all as glorious as the previous one. But nonetheless, we keep seeing how God wants to come into our boat, how God wants to share our life. God seeks us out. You, Lord, are the Good Shepherd who seeks out the lost sheep. You, Lord, are the merchant of fine pearls who sells everything to buy the field, to possess and love that priceless pearl, which is each one of us, even though it seems daring to say it, surely, it's true.

We see it in the New Testament, like God always seeking to be with his people to enter their ordinary life. For example, we think of Zacchaeus who's up a tree in Jericho wanting to catch a glimpse of Jesus of Nazareth. And imagine just how beautiful that, how striking, the Lord who walks under the tree, looks up and says, without further ado, "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down for I must stay at your house today." The house of Zacchaeus, the most avoided house in Jericho, the most, you might say, despised house, in that place, is where the Lord with incredible naturalist says he's going to stay that day. Jesus, you invite yourself into Zacchaeus' home- into Zacchaeus' home with the same naturalness with which you walk into Peter's boat by the Sea of Galilee, with the same naturalness, intimacy, love, gentleness, friendship, with which you visit that family in Bethany of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus and take your rest. Our Lord, who seeks us out, who enters into our ordinary life and fills the texture of ordinariness with the sublime beauty of his presence. And maybe for us now- here and now in this time of the Church, in the *tempus ecclesiae*, the time that goes between the Ascension of Jesus and his Second Coming, the closeness of Our Lord in the Holy Eucharist which fills the Earth with splendor. "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood, he lives in me and I live in him." Lord, you walk into the border of my soul, of my body, of my life, of my everything through the Holy Eucharist. We actually become, in a sense, the Lord's kith and kin through the Eucharist, we share his blood.

This closeness of God, this intimacy with God, this was what St. Josemaria was called by the Lord to- to remind us all of, and- and we can thank the Lord for the charism, the spirit of St. Josemaria which can enrich our ordinary life so- so, so much. He spoke about the mission of the Work, and you could say it's the mission of all Christians, really, to open up the divine paths of God in ordinary life, to open up the divine paths in the ordinary. "There's something holy, there's something divine hidden in the most ordinary circumstances. And it's up to each one of us to discover it," says St. Josemaria. Lord, in seeing you walk into Peter's boat, I learned that you have also walked into my life, that you are close to me, and I don't want to lose sight of this closeness. In fact, I'd like to savor this message more and more and, I guess in this series of reflections on the homily, *The Richness of Ordinary Life*, that's precisely what we've been trying to do, to discover, to savor, and in turn then, in our own way, to spread this intimacy with Christ in the ordinary.

It's a remarkable thing, a beautiful thing that friendship tends to spread. Friendship is a love, and therefore it's contagious. I just finished reading a novel a few days ago about a charming friendship between two British soldiers who meet in the trenches at the first World War. And one of them is- is a very loving person, a very outgoing person, and clearly from a very united and warm family. And what's interesting is as their friendship develops, his family, when they write to this fellow, include his friend in the letters and- and send greetings to the friend. And he, in a sense, the friend is drawn into that love of that family. You could say the friendship spreads. Instead of just being a friendship between two people it becomes a friendship between many people because the friend becomes a

friend of the family of the friend. Friendship is always expansive. And, I suppose our realization or experience as ordinary Christians of the friendship of Christ in the ordinary expands and that becomes evangelization, that becomes shared love, that becomes apostolate which is the very life breath of the Church.

Going back to the homily of St. Josemaria and his meditation on this, on this passage. St. Josemaria meditates on what happens after the Lord has- has done his teaching from the boat: "When he has finished preaching from Peter's boat, Jesus says to the fishermen, *duc in altum et laxate retia vestra in capturam*, Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch. Trusting in Christ's word, they obey and haul in a wonderful catch. Then, turning to Peter, who, like James and John cannot hide- hide his astonishment, the Lord explains, 'Do not be afraid. Henceforth, you will be fishers of men.' And having brought their boats to land, leaving everything behind them, they follow him."

Lord Jesus, when you come into our boat, when you come into our lives, everything changes. Everything is different. The presence of Christ is completely transformative. Maybe not even that perceptibly so, but at a very profound level, everything changes. See how the apostles here who were expert fisherman - they've been trying to fish, they're exhausted, they haven't caught anything, but at the Word of Christ, when you come on board, Lord, then everything changes. This is a lesson that we often hear in Sacred Scripture. You, yourself, tell us Lord in the Last Supper: "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who lives in me and I live in him. He it is who bears much fruit, for apart from me, you can do nothing."

This is very important for us, isn't it? I mean, especially nowadays, when we live in a world which is so focused precisely on being productive and meeting our targets on being excellent- quite a lot in the world of business, as we know, you know, competitiveness. Have you got your goals for the first quarter? For the first semester? I'm not saying these are bad things from- they're probably very good things most of the time, if not all the time. But ultimately, if it's just me doing my thing, it's barren. With- with Christ, everything; without you, Lord, nothing. And that's the beauty of the Christian vocation that is the richness of ordinary life. "To turn," as St. Josemaria says, "to turn the ordinary prose of everyday into heroic verse." But here we need to be attentive because there's a real temptation, a very human temptation, of activism, which, in effect, is doing, doing, doing as if everything depended entirely on me. And that leads to sterility. And often, therefore, also to human frustration.

We could ask the Holy Spirit for the wisdom of God, for the wisdom of what Christ is teaching us here, about what really matters. As Psalm 127 puts it, "Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. It is in vain, that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil, for he gives to his

beloved sleep." So many of our friends, perhaps, and our relations and maybe even ourselves at times, we work so hard, we're so busy, we're so busy, busy, busy all the time, very hard to give a commitment to anything because we're so busy. And then sometimes we stop and say, well, why am I busy? I'm working so hard, but what for? And what are the fruits of it? What ultimately guides my work? Why am I doing it? Doing things with Our Lord helps us to discover the meaning of work which is ultimately, I suppose, love of God and love of others, to change the world, in the profound sense, to change it for eternity. Our work is not simply "me, me, me." It's letting God work, letting God work. How important it is, and how comforting it is, actually, to let the Lord come into our boat. It teaches us to work, really, in a truly human way, which is to work with love.

I remember I was lucky enough to be on the Sea of Galilee a few years ago with a few friends - we went on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. And we went out on the boat and we were praying there together for a while, and then just relaxing, enjoying it, and then there was a storm, and we actually had to come in a bit early as a result. So the- the whole experience was very evangelical, we experienced the storm on the lake. We too, at times, are going to experience storms in our lives. And they can be very disconcerting as we know. Maybe right now you're in the middle of a storm. It could be, you know, the loss of a job, or it could be bereavement, or it could be emotional turmoil, or anxiety, or it could be a family problem, a health problem. There are often storms in our lives. So, if you if you're going through a storm now, don't feel alone because we're all praying for you together in this- in this shared meditation. We're united in our prayer, all of us who are praying with this text. But our comfort even more than the Communion of Saints comes from the communion of Christ. The Lord himself, once he's in the boat, we don't need to worry about anything, we just have to let him take care of us.

St. Josemaria again, in the homily: "If you agree to let God take command of your boat, if you let him be the master, how safe you will be, even when he seems to have gone away, to have fallen asleep, to be unconcerned, even though a storm is rising, and it is pitch dark all around you. St. Mark tells us how once the apostles were in just such circumstances, and Jesus, when the night had reached his fourth quarter, seeing them hard put with rowing, for the wind was against them, came to them walking on the sea. 'Take courage,' he said, 'it is myself. Do not be afraid.' So he came to them onboard the boat and there upon the wind dropped." Perhaps at times, the Lord does test our faith- we're going through a stormy patch and the Lord seems to be asleep. And yet, we know, Lord, that you're always with us and we renew our faith even in the midst at times of darkness.

So, as we finish our prayer, we turn to Mary, the Mother of God and our Mother, and again, talking about Christ stepping into our boat, coming into our home, coming into our all, we see this also in that great, I suppose you could say, the supreme moment of Our Lord's death when he places- he places his own mother within our home, you could say. From the Cross, as St. John recounts: "When

Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing near. He said to his mother, ‘Woman, behold your son.’ Then he said to the disciple, ‘Behold your mother.’ And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.” Again, God who steps into our home, God who- who wants to be in our lives, and here he does it through his mother. When Mary is present, Christ is always also present.

I give you thanks, my God, for the good resolutions, affections, and inspirations you have communicated to me in this time of prayer. I ask you for help to put them into effect. My Mother Immaculate, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.



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