

**Courage, it is I, do not be afraid!**19<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time – Mt 14:22-33

Ave Maria Catholic Church. Sunday, August 13, 2023. Fr. David M Vidal

After praying on the other side of Lake Gennesaret, Jesus returns to the apostles walking on the water.

The apostles see his figure and are terrified, thinking they are seeing a ghost. Then Jesus tells them: “*Courage, it is I, do not be afraid*” (Mt 4:27). Jesus encourages them, and at the same time, Jesus teaches us that we too need courage to face difficulties and trials.

According to the teaching of St Thomas Aquinas, courage is found in a man or woman who is ready to face danger and who is prepared to put up with adversities for a just cause, for truth, for justice, or any other good.

The virtue of courage presupposes vulnerability; without vulnerability, there is no courage. To be brave means to be able to suffer injury. Because a human being is by nature vulnerable, he can be brave.

The manifestations of the virtue of courage are many. Some of them are well known and enjoy a certain fame: such as the courage of the first martyrs who died in the Roman Colosseum. How can we not admire the courage of Saint Ignatius of Antioch, who said: “*I am the wheat of God, and I shall be ground by the teeth of beasts, that I may become the pure bread of Christ.*”

How many good examples of courageous people happen every day without being noticed? But because they are not noticed, it does not mean they have a lesser value!

Let us think about the courageous acts of those who live a chaste life in a world that imposes indecency and wants to disfigure the sacredness of human beings.

Let us think about the courageous men and women who reject success and fame according to the standards of the world, to protect the values of honesty, truth, and family life.

Let us think about the courage of those who prefer to die before tarnishing their souls with a single mortal sin.

There are many, many beautiful examples of heroic virtues, of which nothing is written and little is known. However, those who practice these virtues know them . . . and God certainly knows them!

We must speak more often of these unknown courageous people. Those who have the courage to say “yes” when it is meant to be “yes” and “no” when it is meant to be “no,” and pay the price to do so! These men and women bear witness to our best as human beings.

How do we acquire the virtue of courage? Obviously, it is a grace for which we must pray. However, we must cooperate with God’s grace. We must do our part.

Let’s consider some concrete actions that sustain the courageous act:

First, the secret of our strength rests on the **distrust of self** and **absolute confidence in God**. We must be convinced that without God’s help, we can do nothing. When we start walking on the water thinking that it is by our power and good, this is when we begin to sink. We need the humility to admit that the one who has called us to walk on water will sustain us in that way. Then, we understand that those who are humble are strong because the awareness of their weakness is accompanied by trust in God.

Second, we must **have firm convictions** based upon great truths. Who of us will have the conviction to say like Peter: *“Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water”*? But that is not all. Who of us will have the conviction to get out of the boat and begin to walk on the water when Jesus says, *“Come”*? In many ways, Peter was courageous, but later he was afraid. We must imitate the courageous Peter. We must firmly believe that if the Lord is with us, we can do anything, and the “anything” includes the salvation of our souls and our eternal happiness.

Third, we must **not magnify the difficulties**. There is no obstacle before us that cannot be overcome with God’s grace. We must be sure that God gives us the necessary graces to overcome all obstacles. That is Saint Paul’s message to the Romans: *“What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword? . . . No, in all these things we conquer overwhelmingly through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”* (Rom. 8:35-39).

Finally, **there is no courage without love**. When we truly love, we are ready to sacrifice ourselves for what we love. Is it not love that has made martyrs, virgins, apostles, and all the saints? Because they loved, they were ready to face all difficulties. They faced death, defended the virtue of virginity, preached the good news to those who did not want to listen to them, fought against the world, and more, just because they loved.

It is not easy to be courageous. To live as Christians means to go against the current, against the mentality of our own age. To be courageous means to face the waves and the wind of the world that hit hard trying to crush our Christian values!

Let us be courageous! And when we lack the strength to say “yes” when we must say “yes,” and “no” when we must say “no,” let us pray for this gift that comes from above.

And like Peter, we will be lifted up, taken by the hand, placed inside the boat, and carried to secure land. Amen.