

22. April 2023

“Even in the darkness Jesus is with us”

Jn 6:16-21

*That evening the disciples went down to the shore of the sea and got into a boat to make for Capernaum on the other side of the sea. It was getting dark by now and Jesus had still not rejoined them. The wind was strong, and the sea was getting rough. They had rowed three or four miles when they saw Jesus walking on the sea and coming towards the boat. They were afraid, but he said, 'It's me. Don't be afraid. They were ready to take him into the boat, and immediately it reached the shore at the place they were making for.*

*"It was getting dark by now and Jesus had still not rejoined them."*... We can adapt this situation of the disciples to our way of following Christ or to the way of the Church. The "darkness" spoken of here can be understood beyond a physical reality.

Let us first adapt it to our personal situation. On the path of following Christ, there may be situations in which we find ourselves in the dark. Think, for example, of the disciples after the Lord had died and before He rose from the dead. Their faith was not strong enough to contemplate Jesus' death in this light, nor to remember the words of the Lord, who had already foretold all this to them (cf. Mk 10:33-34).

Something similar can happen to us... Darkness can envelop us, the light seems to have disappeared and Jesus has not yet arrived, or at least that is our impression.

This darkness can have various causes. In the mystical tradition of the Church, we speak of the so-called 'night of the senses' and the 'night of the spirit'. In these terms, it expresses a transformation that we experience along the journey of faith. If our relationship with the Lord had been strongly marked by feelings and emotions, it can happen that, at a moment of God's choosing, He deprives us of the sentimental experience of His presence. Then, what we used to enjoy and find very easy to do, such as singing certain songs, praying with emotion, or performing certain religious practices, suddenly no longer "tastes good" to us. Our senses are, so to speak, in the dark. In this situation, our feelings may rebel, like the storm at sea described in today's

Gospel, and then we get scared. We may see Jesus only in a blur. But in a purification process like this, the Lord has by no means abandoned us; rather, He draws near to us and wants us to know by faith that He is there.

Now, how can we apply this Gospel passage to the way of the Church?

There can also be times of darkness in the Church, such as when there are unresolved controversies; when unfaithfulness and sinfulness cast great shadows; when confusion comes to light and false doctrines germinate, tarnishing and even distorting the face of the Church.

In these times of uncertainty, we must cling to the certainty that Jesus is always with His Church, even if He does not yet seem to have arrived to take the reins and change the situation in a way that is visible to us. We may only be able to see Him in a blur; but He is there, drawing near to us. And He says to us, "*Do not be afraid.*" And it so happens that the boat, which had just been on the sea roughened by a violent storm, meanwhile reaches the shore.

Even if at a certain moment we do not see any light, we are called to believe: the Lord has not left us alone on our personal journey, nor has He abandoned His Church! On the contrary, He leads everything to God's intended goal. Nevertheless, storms and darkness can arise, which must be faced in the Lord. If we remain faithful to Him, we will emerge stronger from such crises and His Church will shine again in such a way that her witness of holiness will attract people and make it easier for them to find her.