

Homily for Saturday of the Second Week of Easter. Given 14 April 2018 at the Acies of the Legion of Mary, Orange County.

(Jn6:16-21) Our Lord's first miracle at Cana in Galilee was seemingly performed over a trifle. It served to save a young couple from social embarrassment. However, when He walks on water in today's gospel, our Lord's modern critics will want to accuse Him of exhibitionism. To understand why Jesus walked on water we must first examine the immediate context of this astounding miracle. Our Lord was about to reveal the great mystery of the Holy Eucharist. He would soon announce that Holy Communion – eating His Flesh and drinking His Blood – was an absolute necessity. More than any other teaching, this one scandalized His listeners; and not only them, but even His committed followers. After Jesus announced the Holy Eucharist, “many of His disciples drew back and no longer walked with Him.” (Jn6:66) Even the Twelve were badly shaken. This may be where His betrayer, Judas, first lost faith. Peter, on the other hand, rallied the others to Jesus. When our Lord asked them if they too would leave, Peter said, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” (Jn6:68) We might ask ourselves when and how Peter learned to trust like this? – Was it not out on the lake the night before? Matthew's account of the same maritime miracle tells us that Peter also walked upon the waves so long, that is, as He trusted in Jesus. When he doubted, however, he started to sink. Thereupon, he cried out: “Lord, save me!” Jesus did so, saying, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” (Mt14:30b,31b) The moral of the story: to doubt in Jesus is to perish!

One good reason why our Lord walked on the water was to strengthen His apostles' faith lest they too be scandalized by the sublime doctrine of the Eucharist. When our wave walking Lord finally caught up with their boat that night, the apostles thinking that He was a ghost, were frightened. Jesus reassured them, saying “Take heart! It is I! Have no fear!” (Mt14:27b) In the Old Testament, God alone had power over the sea. Today we say that all of nature is governed by laws. Even so, only the Author of nature has power to suspend the laws of nature. In this context, Jesus' reassuring greeting “It is I!” – which literally translates, “I am!” – is pregnant with meaning. It harkens back to the episode of the burning bush wherein God solemnly revealed His ineffable name “I AM” to Moses. (Ex3:14) None of this innuendo was lost on the apostles. No sooner had Jesus rescued Peter from drowning, than they all cried out, saying: “Truly, you are the Son of God!” (Mt14:33b)

During the subsequent crisis of faith over the Eucharist, Jesus offered one 'helping hand' to His murmuring disciples when He asked: “What if you were to see the Son of Man ascend to where He was before?” (Jn6:62) In other words, our Lord's Body would visibly ascend to the Father. So, it wouldn't remain behind to be cannibalized, as they supposed. After seeing Jesus' weightless body treading upon the waves the night before, the apostles would take this amazing talk of His Ascension on high very seriously. What's more, Jesus' walking on the waves would leave them wondering: “If Jesus could suspend the weight of His Body, what other properties of His Body could He also suspend?” The apostles may not have guessed that He would also suspend its extension, but they trusted that some such explanation would be forthcoming. When He walked on water, our Lord's Body assumed one of the properties of a resurrected body. The only other time His apostles would mistake Him for a ghost would be when He actually appeared to them in His resurrected body.

In order to understand why Jesus walked upon the water, we have examined the historical context of this miracle. So far, we've only considered what happened immediately afterwards. Now let's consider what happened immediately beforehand. Jesus had miraculously multiplied a few loaves and fish to feed a great multitude of hungry pilgrims in the wilderness. Here finally was the material plenty that was supposed to accompany the messiah's reign. The messiah of the popular imagination was supposed to be the bearer extraordinaire of temporal blessings. Jesus, on the other hand, promised that His followers would endure persecution here below. The messiah of the multitude would rule a kingdom of this world. Jesus' kingdom originated on high. The masses were expecting a prince of war; Jesus was Prince of Peace. Their messiah would be a man of success; Jesus was a man of sorrows. Their messiah would vanquish and despoil his enemies. Jesus came to pardon and forgive His enemies. Their messiah's methodology would be hatred. Jesus sole tactic was love. Many would have to die for their messiah's cause. Jesus singlehandedly died for our cause. Their messiah's reward would be earthly. Jesus promises us eternal life.

This popularly acclaimed counterfeit messianism had most people fooled. John tells us that the multitude was in a nationalistic frenzy after being fed. They were about to crown Jesus king. Before dismissing and finally eluding the crowds, Jesus made the apostles leave immediately in the boat without even waiting for Him. He would catch up with them later. By doing this, our Lord was in effect protecting His apostles from a highly contagious, false devotion to the anti-Christ of popular expectation. Here, then, is the reason for the separation

between master and disciples that our Lord's miraculous trek upon the water resolved. Jesus' solicitude for true devotion is at least a necessary occasion for the miracle.

Seventeen centuries after our Lord decisively segregated His disciples from the enthusiastic partisans of false devotion to Christ, St. Louis de Montfort did something similar in regard to Marian devotion. The very title of his spiritual masterpiece reveals this fact. He called it "True Devotion to Mary," that is, the true devotion as opposed to so many other false devotions. Therein, St. Louis de Montfort wrote the following: "A counterfeit usually only [simulates] coins of gold and silver, rarely of other metals, because these latter would not be worth the trouble. Similarly, the devil leaves other devotions alone and counterfeits mostly those directed to Jesus and Mary... because these are to other devotions what gold and silver are to other metals." (True Devotion, 90)

St. Louis de Montfort lists seven counterfeit devotions to Mary. First, he speaks about critical devotees. In the saint's day, they were mostly learned scholars. While pretending to correct abuses, they also sabotaged true devotion to Mary. Scrupulous devotees in turn are afraid of paying too much attention to Mary as if it were possible to love her too much. Out of respect for our Lord, they are afraid of having too much devotion to His Mother. They build their objections on half-truths. "It annoys them to see more people kneeling before Mary's altar than before the Blessed Sacrament, as if these acts were at variance with each other." (TD,94) "The Church, with the Holy Spirit, blesses our Lady first, then Jesus, 'Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.' Not that Mary is greater than Jesus, or even equal to Him – that would be an intolerable heresy. But in order to bless Jesus more perfectly we should first bless Mary." (TD,95)

Next, our saint laments that the world is full of superficial devotees. They say many rosaries with great haste. They're not preoccupied with growing in holiness nor do they imitate Mary's virtues. Above all they seek their own emotional consolation and when they don't experience it they routinely omit their prayers. Their devotion is external rather than internal.

Our saint spends much more time debunking presumption than any of the other false devotions. "Presumptuous devotees are sinners who give full rein to their passions or their love of the world, and who, under the fair name of Christian and servant of our Lady, conceal pride, avarice, lust, drunkenness, anger, swearing, slandering, injustice and other vices." (TD,97) "Blinding themselves still more, they quote stories they have heard or read – whether true or false does not bother them – which relate how people who had died in mortal sin were brought back to life again to go to confession... because in their lifetime they said a few prayers or performed a few pious acts in honor of our Lady." (TD,97) "Nothing in our Christian religion is so deserving of condemnation as this diabolical presumption. How can we truthfully claim to love and honor the Blessed Virgin when by our sins we pitilessly wound, pierce, crucify and outrage her Son. If Mary made it a rule to save by her mercy this sort of person, she would be condoning wickedness and helping to outrage her son. Who would even dare to think such a thing?" (TD,98)

Presumptuous devotees aren't people who, in a moment of weakness, give into mortal sin and then deeply lament it. Quite the contrary! After consecrating themselves to our Lady and thereby becoming her servants, these false devotees, "under the cover of a fictitious devotion to our Lady, [actually] wallow in their sins." (TD,104) Concerning such as these the psalmist said, "Even on their beds they plot evil." (Ps36:4) For these false devotees of our Lady, St. Louis de Montfort has some very strong words: "I declare," he writes, "that such an abuse of devotion to her is a horrible sacrilege and, next to an unworthy Communion, is the greatest and least pardonable sin, because devotion to our Lady is the holiest and best after devotion to the Blessed Sacrament." (TD,99) The saint ends his treatment of presumptuous devotees by pointing out how surprisingly effective true devotion is in converting even habit-hardened sinners.

Next, our saint describes inconstant devotees. They 'bite off more than they can chew' only to give up all their resolutions in the end. They vacillate between extremes whereas true virtue lies in the middle. True devotees commit to doing what is possible and then follow through despite every obstacle. Hypocritical devotees in turn only want to bask in Mary's limelight. They're trying to please men more than our Lady. They want the glamour of holiness without undertaking the arduous renunciation of self that it involves. Finally, self-interested devotees are spiritual mercenaries. Their prayers are performed more for temporal rewards than out of true love for our Lady. They only want "to be rid of bodily ills or to obtain material benefits." (TD,104)

Our Lord quickly segregated His apostles from the multitude of false devotees because their Christ was really an anti-Christ. Devotion to him was the exact opposite of true devotion to Christ. Our Lord, on the other hand, was about to lay the groundwork for true devotion to Himself, which consists in profound honor and devout

reception of the Most Holy Eucharist. Likewise, after describing the seven false devotions to our Lady, St. Louis Marie de Montfort next explains how true devotion to our Lady is the exact opposite of these counterfeit devotions. "It is interior, trustful, holy, constant and disinterested." (TD, 105) In today's gospel, our Lord's 'hour' was pressing on. He simply didn't have time to wait for another boat so He walked upon the water. We don't have time either to learn from our own mistakes. Let's listen instead to St. Louis de Montfort so that we might be true devotees of our Lady, who learn rather from the mistakes others have made before us. So be it! Amen!