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## *Walking on the Water*

*Marcellino D'Ambrosio*



One of the most famous stories of the New Testament is the one about Jesus walking on the water. If there is any gospel story we never tire of hearing, this is it.

The lake is rough. Though several of the apostles spent most of their life in a boat, they're still worried. But when they see a phantom walking towards them on the whitecaps, they get really scared. Then the figure speaks and they recognize a familiar voice—it is

the Lord!

Remember the old saying “fools rush in where angels fear to tread?” Well here goes Peter: “Lord, if it's really you, tell me to come to you across the water.” The Lord takes him up on it. “Come!” he says. So Peter gives it a try. The first few steps go great and he's pumped. But funny thing—when the Lord told him to come, he neglected to calm the wind and the waves. And as Peter, far from the security of the boat and the company of his buddies, finds himself buffeted by strong gusts and swirling waves, fear gets the best of him. He begins to sink. Remembering that Jesus is not too far off, he has the sense to cry out “**Lord save me!**”

The Lord fishes him out and then gently rebukes him. Jesus doesn't say that Peter has no faith. After all, he had more faith than the other eleven—at least he stepped out of the boat. But Jesus' statement is telling: “how little faith you have! Why did you falter?”

I think we love this story because we can so easily relate to it. In various moments of pious enthusiasm, we surrender our lives, our will, and our future to God. “Just tell me Lord, what you want me to do and I'll obey.” And then He surprises us a bit by taking us up on our offer. Undaunted, we respond to the call. It could be to the sacrament of matrimony which entails lifelong fidelity and generous openness to children. It could be to priesthood and



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religious life which involve celibacy and obedience to a superior. Or it could be to a degree program, or a tour of duty in the armed forces. We often embark on our journey amidst fanfare and congratulations. Then the harsh reality of the everyday grind sets in. Next come unexpected road hazards. No sooner is a child born with serious medical problems than you lose your job. A model child turns into a rebellious teen who rejects all of your values, including your faith.

If we are honest, most of us notice butterflies flying inside our stomachs amidst such circumstances.

Does trust mean immunity from feelings of fear and discouragement? No. Jesus himself experienced anguish and dread in the Garden of Gethsemani. But notice that he was not deterred by it. He did not hesitate or falter as Peter did and as we usually do.



**“Little” faith means immature faith.** Faith, to be mature, must be tempered with courage, also known as fortitude. Courage only is manifested in the face of danger. If there is no danger, no threat, no trial, then there is no possibility of courage. Mature faith means believing more in what you can’t see than in the terrifying things you can see. It means keeping the eyes of your heart fixed on the master of the wind and waves even as you feel the spray in your face.

The most frequently repeated phrase in the gospels is **“Do not be afraid!”** The Lord is not speaking to our emotions here, since you can’t command emotions. He is speaking to our will. We must make a conscious decision not to allow fear to paralyze us. Peter sank because he stopped walking. Faith means to keep walking even when your knees are knocking.

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*This was originally published in [Our Sunday Visitor](#) as a reflection upon the readings for the 19<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, liturgical cycle A (1 Kings 19:9, 11-13), Psalm 85, Romans 9:1-5; Matthew 14:22-33). It is reproduced here with the permission of the author.*

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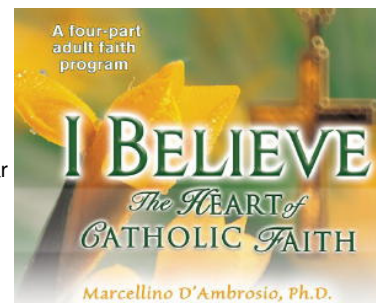
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