

Fr. Perozich comments —

Peter Kwasniewski's own comments are sufficient for comment.

- ***In our days, we are seeing an intensification of the spiritual battle*** as the situation within the Catholic Church continues to deteriorate.
- ***One particular cause of psychological unrest today is the battleground of social media, the maelstrom of opinions from semi-educated loudmouths.***
- *those who are suffering shipwreck is that they focus their attention primarily or even exclusively on the Church as a human institution. By doing this, however, we go at the whole thing backward.*
- *There is no way to know or understand or figure out the Church (or theology or liturgy or anything) without that fundamental relationship with Christ—being a son of the Father in and through Him.*
- ***Among other things, He is alive and active in the Eucharist.*** *This is for real: praying before and living from the Eucharist has made great saints—in every century, in every region, in every conceivable situation. Who fixes God's Church? Saints do. How do men and women become saints? They do so by prayer and trust, not by thrashing around and venting and attacking.*
- *The Church lives His life and that means she lives His Passion: she, too—at least at times—will be a bloody mess, dying in her humiliation, but not left forever in that state.*
- *It seems to me that many today are being driven by fear, including the fear of the dissolution of the “hierarchical” Church or its exposure as a fraud.*
- *“It is not the task of Christianity to provide easy answers for every question, but to progressively make us aware of mystery. God is not so much the object of our knowledge as He is the cause of our awe,” as Albert Rossi says.*

- *The foundation of fruitless suffering is the lack of friendship with Jesus, just as the foundation of fruitful suffering is union with Him.*

- *Our identity is not in being Catholic or in defending the Church but in being Christ's (that is what it means to be a "Christian").*

- *One particular cause of psychological unrest today is the battleground of social media, the maelstrom of opinions from semi-educated loudmouths. Living in the midst of this realm can be frustrating and cause us to lose our peace (or to not be able to acquire it in the first place); it prioritizes the immediate, the egregious, and the depressing over the longer vision, the unmoving truth, the sparks of joy. We get buried alive in this avalanche of information. We suffocate from squadrons of pontificating pundits. Christians who find themselves in "panic mode," undergoing a personal crisis, have a moral obligation to pull back, to withdraw, or at least to restructure their approach to media.*

- *I would die—dry up spiritually—if I did not start my day **apart** from my online work. I've tried to erect barriers and boundaries to it. When I get up in the morning, before any device goes on, I pray Prime and read some Scripture; I go to Mass most days, and I take other breaks during the day to say Terce, Sext, or None (or all three if I can manage) so that I can maintain perspective and not lose my peace altogether—or lose my awareness of the one and only relationship that ultimately matters, the One on whom everything else depends.*

- *This discipline of prayer and sacraments has kept me from losing my mind.*

That is the challenge of faith, is it not? Jesus says: *Come and see. Take up your cross and follow me. Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these other things will be added to you.*

In the Midst of Crisis, Be Driven by Faith, Not by Fear

PETER KWASNIEWSKI



In our days, we are seeing an intensification of the spiritual battle as the situation within the Catholic Church continues to deteriorate. Battles have casualties, and some of those casualties are Catholics who have lost their faith or are tempted to leave the Church because of the outrageous corruption, infidelity, and cowardice of its leaders and the seeming lack of any coherent solution amidst anarchy.

The common denominator I have seen in **those who are suffering shipwreck is that they focus their**

attention primarily or even exclusively on *the Church as a human institution*. By doing this, however, we go at the whole thing backward.

The Church was not first in time, nor is it first in our lives. Christ came first: *He* sought out the apostles, *He* attracted the disciples, *He* redeemed us, *He* saves us even now, and the point of our whole life is to get to know *Him*. To be sure, He is the head of the Church, and we are members of that Church; it is the “place” where we meet Him. But it is neither first nor last.

There is no way to know or understand or figure out the Church (or theology or liturgy or anything) without that fundamental relationship with Christ—being a son of the Father in and through Him. He is the Rock below the rock (Peter/the pope), and He is the only Rock that never shifts, being eternally stable.

We all know the story in which Jesus is sleeping in the bow of the storm-tossed boat. To some people today, it seems He’s never going to wake up from His slumber. This, too, is untrue. Rather, we are too busy freaking out to see that Christ is already awake and *waiting to look us in the eye*, if only we would stop for a moment, overcome our fear of silence, our fear of being alone with Him, and rest in Him.

Among other things, He is alive and active in the Eucharist. This is for real: praying before and living from the Eucharist has made great saints—in every century, in every region, in every conceivable situation. Who fixes God’s Church? *Saints do*. How do men and women become saints? They do so by prayer and trust, not by thrashing around and venting and attacking.

Our modern vice *par excellence* is activism. We are all inveterate activists who think that it's "my fight for Catholicism" that matters. That is as sad as it is laughable. It is *righteous men*, however few they are, who hold this world together, as God said to Abraham. When Our Lady shows up, she doesn't say "Talk more" or "Kill 'em on Twitter!"; she says "Pray and do penance."

St. Augustine and St. Anselm, two of the greatest intellects and saints in our tradition, both held tightly to this saying from Isaiah: "Unless you believe, you will not understand." It may sound terribly anti-intellectual, but it's not a truth limited to the supernatural realm; the same truth is verified again and again in human relationships, too.

Understanding is not where we begin but where we end—when we have been faithful, when we have trusted, and when we have surrendered to a reality greater than ourselves and our ability to grasp it, or control it, or help it along.

We are like the disciples in that boat: we expect Christ to do things according to *our* ideas of how it should be done: the warrior Messiah kicking the *viscera* out of the Romans. His idea of that strategy was shown clearly enough in Gethsemane and on Calvary, when He allowed Himself to be reduced to a bloody pulp, knowing that He was still in command and that He would have the last word, for He simply is the first and last and only Word. **The Church lives His life and that means she lives His Passion: she, too—at least at times—will be a bloody mess, dying in her humiliation, but not left forever in that state.**

Illustrations from history abound. The Arian crisis is often raised, and it should not be brushed aside, for it is enormously relevant to the problems we are facing. Someone who was born around the year 325 and who died around the

year 400 would have spent his or her *entire life* under the shadow of Arianism, in a Church where the vast majority of bishops were heretics or cowards, where the few good bishops were hounded from place to place, where even popes were ineffectual or compromised. A pope excommunicated St. Athanasius, the greatest confessor of the age.

As Newman shows, it was the faithful who kept the Faith. Did they complain that Jesus, the Son of God—the One whose royal divinity they confessed—was sleeping in their boat? Perhaps some did (and there is a way of complaining in the psalms that can be a form of prayer!), but the Faith survived because most of them didn't lose heart; they held fast, no matter what, knowing that it is not we who choose when we live, but Providence.

My hypothetical Catholic who lived from 325 to 400 sometimes had to worship out in the desert because the church buildings were stolen from the Catholics by the impostors. He admired the rare figures like St. Athanasius and St. Hilary, but he knew they were vastly outnumbered. That fourth-century Catholic *never saw a healthy functional Church, either.*

The situation in Reformation England was not too different for the Catholics who lived through it. A man who was born during Henry VIII's reign and who lived a long life would have seen his country go from Roman Catholicism to Anglo-Catholicism to Calvinism back to Catholicism and finally to Anglicanism. The politicians were complicit except for St. Thomas More; the bishops were complicit except for St. John Fisher.

Yet there were many great saints from that period, and many unsung heroes known to God alone, who were catapulted into holiness by the crisis. They were forced to seek

refuge in Christ and not in princes, in mortal men in whom there is no help. Why did this happen? Why did He allow it to happen? We still do not have answers that can satisfy us in this life, but we can also see God's hand at work in the stupendous blossoms of sanctity that have graced England, including a renewal of martyrdoms worthy of the ancient Roman Empire.

It seems to me that many today are being driven by fear, including the fear of the dissolution of the “hierarchical” Church or its exposure as a fraud. This fear is generated, or at least made possible, by our inability to see the big picture, or by thinking that we see enough to know it's irrational and ugly. In any case, we want things to make sense on our own terms. That isn't how God does things—never has been, never will be. It's not for nothing that He is said to be infinite mystery. How could it be otherwise? He's not a giant creature lording it over us (as the serpent in the garden tried to get Adam and Eve to think). *He is the root of all. He is in everything and beyond everything.*

“It is not the task of Christianity to provide easy answers for every question, but to progressively make us aware of mystery. God is not so much the object of our knowledge as He is the cause of our awe,” as Albert Rossi says. Rossi also makes the point, which I've come to rely on, that we need to learn to live with unclarity, uncertainty, ambiguity. One could even say it's a sign of mental health: the ability to go forward without seeing fully; the ability to let things be as they are, without despairing or hyperventilating; the ability to rest content with knowing what is essential. Rossi puts it in three statements: “I know that I don't know. I know that Christ knows. I trust Him.”

The foundation of fruitless suffering is the lack of friendship with Jesus, just as the foundation of fruitful suffering is union with Him. We will not have, and cannot have, healthy relationships with anyone—including the Church and her leaders and her members—unless we have a relationship with Christ. To the extent that we do not have it, the inherent weakness, the tendency to dissipation in material and mortal things, will prevail.

When Our Lord puts us through a fiery trial, it is because He knows we need this; we need to *meet Him there*. A priest once said in the confessional: “The place where you are hurting is the place where Jesus wants to meet you. His wounds are your refuge: they have the power to heal your wounds.” But they will not do so if we are busy fleeing Him, tearing out our hair, and questioning whether He loves us or cares about us. That is how we cut ourselves off from *the only place that reality is*, from the only One who sees it and governs it. The only way to have peace is to be in God’s presence, because there is no peace outside of Him. Really: none at all. How could there be?

Our identity is not in being Catholic or in defending the Church but *in being Christ’s* (that is what it means to be a “Christian”). Yes, we belong to His Body, but still our fundamental identity is to be His, to be a son in the Son, a beloved son of the Father. “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” God says that to each one of us: You, *you* are my beloved son. There is no healing for wounded sonship and wounded fatherhood outside of the Father and the Son.

“Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” Do we think the saints are liars? They asked, sought, and knocked, and they received,

found, and got in—over and over again, for the past 2,000 years (or more, if we include the saints of the old covenant). We are lacking nothing that they had: we got the whole package. Yet we *do* have to ask, seek, and knock; it doesn't happen automatically or by chance. It happens by turning again and again to Him.

Our problems are usually *not* intellectual. They are problems of the heart, at the center of our being, not in the airy world of concepts, and therefore not in the realm of apologetics.

One particular cause of psychological unrest today is the battleground of social media, the maelstrom of opinions from semi-educated loudmouths. Living in the midst of this realm can be frustrating and cause us to lose our peace (or to not be able to acquire it in the first place); it prioritizes the immediate, the egregious, and the depressing over the longer vision, the unmoving truth, the sparks of joy. We get buried alive in this avalanche of information. We suffocate from squadrons of pontificating pundits. Christians who find themselves in “panic mode,” undergoing a personal crisis, have a moral obligation to pull back, to withdraw, or at least to restructure their approach to media.

I'm no paragon of virtue by any stretch of the imagination, but **I would *die*—dry up spiritually—if I did not start my day apart from my online work.** I've tried to erect barriers and boundaries to it. When I get up in the morning, before any device goes on, I pray Prime and read some Scripture; I go to Mass most days, and I take other breaks during the day to say Terce, Sext, or None (or all three if I can manage) so that I can maintain perspective and not

lose my peace altogether—or lose my awareness of the one and only relationship that ultimately matters, the One on whom everything else depends.

Br. Lawrence of the Resurrection called it “the practice of the presence of God.” I’m pretty clumsy at it, but I have enough experience to know that I would perish without it. This discipline of prayer and sacraments has kept me from losing my mind.

That is the challenge of faith, is it not? Jesus says: *Come and see. Take up your cross and follow me. Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these other things will be added to you.* That’s it: He invites, He does not compel. He promises everything to the one who gives himself to Him. The only way to know if He is right is to *do* it, to follow Him and to taste what He offers.

This is not a platitude but the Gospel truth. Sure, we can call it a leap of faith—but when you have ferocious beasts chasing you and you’re running toward the edge, you’re either going to have to leap into what you believe and hope to be God’s embrace or lie down and let them consume you.

[Image: The Storm on the Sea of Galilee by Rembrandt]



By Peter Kwasniewski

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