

# St. Anthony of Padua R.C. Church

160 Court Street, Buffalo, New York

**TRADITIONALLY SPEAKING** by S. Casarotto, cs 2/15/09

## THE BOAT OF PETER

The boat in a stormy sea (Mt. 8, 23f) has often been seen by the Fathers of the Church as a symbol of the Church journeying through history.

We know that the world is a rough sea, stirred by the winds of pride, power and greed of a fallen humanity. Jesus told us, "You are in the world, but you are not of the world." And He assured us: "Do not be afraid! I have conquered the world!"

The problems in the Church are not new nor did they start with Vatican II. The debates among the Bishops became heated when they began to reflect upon what the Church is: to itself, to the world, to other religions and how the Church is to evangelize the world today. During the Council, the Church read, as Jesus told us to, the "signs of the times." It was not a reading simply based on sociological surveys, but a reading of faith of the contemporary world and a refocusing on Christ, "Light of the Nations". The Church realized more than ever that as it crosses the high seas, it has to be "light of the nations."

Peter's boat never sailed in tranquil waters and we should not be surprised that it is still rocking today. Sometimes it seems that it is taking water to the point of sinking. Some people would like to scuttle this boat. Others are in a continuous state of mutiny. Some are jumping ship. Many people have their own idea of what the Church is, what it should be doing and where it should be going. Some are trying to take over the bridge, choose their own captain and follow a new chart. There are also many who are formally still in the Church but their life is floating in uncharted waters. And we should not forget that the history of the Church is also full of prophets of doom, self-proclaimed reformers and self-righteous people.

The Gospel does not say that the Apostles turned against Peter, blaming him for the conditions of his boat or for taking it out to sea when he should have foreseen the storm. It does not say that Jesus Himself took over at the helm or that He plucked the boat out of the waters and quickly deposited it in the harbor of Bethsaida!

Pope Paul VI once said: "We must love the Church to understand the Church." It must be the understanding of faith and love for the visible, historical, hierarchical, One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church which holds and passes on the Living Tradition of the Apostles, the faith of the Martyrs, the faith of the Fathers of the Church, the faith of the Saints of all times. The Church is a divine and human institution. The human church (its members, its laws and institutions) are not perfect. In fact, very often we all betray our Master. That's why "Ecclesia semper reformanda", the Church must always reform. St. Ambrose even dared to call the Church "casta meretrix", the chaste prostitute. In the meantime, as then Card. Ratzinger once put it, we hold on to the Church because it is the only means of salvation we have.

If we truly believe that the Church belongs to Christ and Christ is always on board, we will think and act humbly. We will be always grateful that we belong to Holy Mother Catholic Church. We then realize that we do not have reason to quarrel about "our" or "their" Church, "our" or "their" traditions, the Church "before" and "after" Vatican II. Faith, love and humility will make us aware of our imperfections and the imperfections of the Church. Faith in the boat of Peter is faith in Jesus who rides on it and who said to Peter, "The powers of death shall not prevail Non praevalent! I prayed for you! Do not be afraid!". Eventually the boat will get

to the Heavenly Harbor. That's Christian optimism: we are always in good hands. Pagan Cicero has a good advice: "Alia ego vidi venta; alias prospexi animo procellas. " (Familiares, 12, 25.5) I have seen other winds, I have beheld other storms.

Let us remember that the boat of Peter was not saved by the arguments of people on board, but by prayer: "Lord, save us!" Souls are saved only by grace. We should not be concerned about saving the Church, but about saving ourselves and others through His Church.