

You might not be aware that there is a tradition wherein the pope gives a short reflection, called an “angelus,” on the Gospel every Sunday. A previous angelus by Pope Francis on the Gospel today (which concerns Jesus walking on the water), offers some historical context and perspective worth sharing.

In the time of Jesus, large bodies of water were thought to be the “haunts of evil powers” that humans were not able to master. Particularly during storms, the watery depths were symbols of chaos and “recalled the darkness of the underworld.” The disciples in the Gospel fear the storm will cause them to be “sucked in by evil.” Pope Francis articulated:

*And here comes Jesus who walks on the water, that is, over the powers of evil. He walks over the forces of evil and says to his disciples: “Take heart, it is I; have no fear” (v. 27). This is the message Jesus gives us. This is the meaning of the sign: the powers of evil that frighten us, that we cannot master, immediately take on smaller proportions with Jesus. By walking on the waters, He wants to say, “Do not be afraid. I put your enemies under my feet” — a beautiful message — I put your enemies under my feet — not people! — not that type of enemy, but death, sin, the devil. These are the enemies of the people, our enemies. And Jesus tramples on these enemies for us.*

In these days, we can be easily reminded of the evils stirring in our world, and in our own hearts. A way we stay grounded and courageous is through our faith in Jesus whose love transcends the work of “these enemies,” and that he stays above their reach. Not only that, Jesus’s outstretched hand is there immediately if we only cry out like Peter: “Lord, save me!”

“Lord, save me!” Pope Francis points out that “this prayer is beautiful. It expresses the certainty that God can save us, that he conquers our evil and our fears.” Either now, or when you find yourself overwhelmed by the challenges both close to you or seemingly far away, I invite you to say this prayer, out loud even, and shield yourself with the courage it brings, and the consciousness that we are not alone.

Justin Lorenz

*Quotes are from the Angelus of Pope Francis, Saint Peter’s Square, Sunday, 13 August 2023*