“The most beautiful act of faith is the one made in darkness, in sacrifice, and with extreme effort.” – St. Padre Pio

We all experience it: the storm that shakes us as it did the Apostles. The wood of the frail boat creaks; it shudders beneath the thrash of waves. We look up into the sky and we do not see any light, not the slightest flicker of even the tiniest of stars. Our Lord was there, awake. His eyes were the bright sun and His words had kept the waves still. Now He’s asleep. We know He’s here, His promises assure us of that fact. It would be silly to jump ship with Him still in it. It would be foolish, in fact, to think it would sink with Him still in it.

Whether it be the paralysis of scruples or the temptation to doubt our Faith, we will undoubtedly experience a storm in this life of peril, a cross that weighs down on us so heavily, it is as if blood and sweat drip into our eyes, so that we can barely see our way. But He does not abandon us. In this time of crisis in the Church, we need to constantly remind ourselves of that fact. He is merciful. He loves us and wants our salvation even more than we do, and we are not alone. We may doubt that we are doing the right thing in response to the crisis. We may even be tempted to question our Faith; especially in a time when so many in authoritative positions in the Church are saying things that are contradictory to what we read in our Catechism and in the Bible, what we know to be true.

But Our Lord is still here, beside us in the dark. What does it matter if He appears awake or asleep, if He is still in our soul? We can still speak to Him even when it feels like He isn’t listening because we know He is, in fact, listening. Our feelings do not define reality and the devil, the king of confusion, the disrupter of peace, isn’t stupid. He knows how to get to us; and no matter your level of God-given intelligence, sometimes the devil can penetrate so deep that even the strongest faith, the deepest intelligence can seem to be shaken, beaten at, thrashed about amidst dangerous waves; and those things that once seemed to make such perfect sense, they can suddenly seem to make no sense at all.

There are many whose examples we should carry before us during these times. Saint Thérèse of Lisieux is one of them — the little saint whose prayers seemed to penetrate the heart of a murderer before she was even a bride of Christ; the young woman who bore little patience when it came to waiting to give herself in the deepest way she could think of to her God; the one who did all she could to hasten the accomplishment of His Will in her, even if it meant making a trip to Pope Leo XIII and speaking to His Holiness when she was told not to. She should be one of our many beacons of light precisely because of the intensely agonizing fight in darkness that she won.

In letters and in her own autobiography, she compares herself to a “frail skiff without a pilot, at the mercy of the stormy waves” and with her Jesus “asleep in [her] little boat” (*The*

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Story of a Soul, Ch V.) This image of her in a boat, with her Jesus asleep are painted quite often in her writings, but what does she do? She lets him sleep; she dares not wake Him. He is tired, she wants only His pleasure. She allows herself to endure this storm, this dark night for as long as He wills.

St. Thérèse endured many trials: the death of her mother at a young age, an intense bout of scruples, the sickness of her beloved father, his death, the gossip attributing his illness to her, his youngest, leaving home. All of these crosses, as well as the "pin-pricks" as she would call them of religious life, were at times like fog to obscure not only her vision, but that of her sisters, to whom she often wrote to encourage and comfort. "My dear Celine," Thérèse wrote once: "…It is not in the sweetness of repose that Jesus would have us discover His Adorable Presence. He hides Himself and shrouds Himself in darkness…" (*Story of a Soul*).

She then goes on to explain to her sister that it is the "weaker souls" He uplifted with His "eloquent words", but His faithful friends were "few that day when he was silent…" and yet, despite how terrifying the sounds of that must have surely been, she goes on to say, "sweet melody to my heart is that silence of the Divine Master!" (*Story of a Soul*, letter XV.)

However, possibly greater than the hardships of religious life or the death of those she most loved, were Thérèse's temptations to doubt the Faith, in particular the existence of Heaven, which she endured most bravely. All the more intense would have been this temptation for a nun to bear who had given up her whole life for the loving God. The distractions of the world weren't there to take her mind off of it. The silence of the cloister would have been nearly smothering to her at such a time. Imagine you left all, made the sacrifice of a family of your own, vowed yourself to obedience to a superior that was not always very pleasant; and then imagine if the thought of Heaven, a thought that soothed every cross, suddenly rebelled against you. How much more painful to a bride of Christ would the temptation to doubt your Faith be.

St. Thérèse mentions this suffering in her autobiography, saying that Jesus allowed her soul "to be overwhelmed with darkness" and that the consoling thought of Heaven "now became a subject of conflict and torture." She goes on to say that it were as if she could hear the voice of the "unbeliever" who taunted her with the mocking idea of a "night darker still, the night of utter nothingness!" (*Story of a Soul*, Ch IX)

While she speaks of this suffering in her autobiography, she does not paint the full picture, possibly because, as she herself said, "I fear that to write more were to blaspheme" (*Story of a Soul*, Ch IX). The portrayal of this suffering is found to a much greater extent in her private letters and in the accounts her sisters gave later.

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One of these accounts which her sister Pauline gave, was this: that in answer to her temptations, Thérèse took the book of the Gospels and wrote the entire *Credo* in her blood. Just imagine how intense must have been those "feelings" that Heaven did not exist, of unbelief, for her to respond in such a a violent way.

No wonder she is the Patroness of missionaries – although not in a literal sense, she stood before the executioners tempting her to give up the Faith, and said firmly, "I believe"; and like St. Peter Martyr, who wrote "Credo" in his blood as he was dying, so did she.

In this era when the idea that truth is subjective is a commonly widespread notion, during this time when the Church itself seems to be infested with wolves from within, St. Thérèse is the saint for our times. So let us kneel and pray the prayer of Little Thérèse of Lisieux and offer up our moment in such darkness to obtain light for sinners. (*The Story of a Soul*, Letter IV) May we follow her example on how to act when Our Lord is asleep in our boat and not lose hope by any means, but fall into His arms, cling to Him in this storm, and simply trust.

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