

# KEEP CALM AND STAY POSITIVE



## ~ Letter from the Superior General to the Passionist Family ~

As I walked among the small crowd of people here in Rome yesterday afternoon, I noticed the sign on the T-shirt of a young man: **KEEP CALM AND STAY POSITIVE**. Not a bad message, I thought, for these times – but it is a big ask!

In my last letter, **ENCOURAGEMENT IN TRYING TIMES**, I reflected a little about “*living on hope*” ... and we must continue not to lose hope, without which we cannot ‘keep calm and stay positive’. But, for how much longer? It seems like our hopes have been dashed! No sooner have we weathered the storm caused by the Covid-19 pandemic with promising hopes that we’ve got things under control, than, like a tsunami, a ‘second wave’ of the Covid-19 virus (more devastating than the first) wreaks havoc – compounded by other natural and man-made disasters (like the devastating chemical explosion in Beirut). Not so easy to ‘*keep calm and stay positive*’ in these circumstances or to keep on clinging to the anchor of hope.

The coronavirus pandemic has highlighted the fact that everyone in the world faces ‘storms’ in life. No one is immune from the pain, difficulties and trials that is part of life. This pandemic is one particular ‘storm’ which we are currently battling in life.

In this letter, I wish to share with you some insights and reflections based on the Gospel story of Jesus walking on the stormy water and inviting Peter to do so also – **Mt. 14: 22-33**:

*“...while the boat, by now far out on the lake,  
was battling with a heavy sea, for there was a headwind.”*

In these lines we have a good symbolism for **life** and its vicissitudes. Life is like sailing on the high seas. As we grow up, we leave the safe shore and gradually sail farther and farther out to sea. And that’s where we meet with storms, strong winds, and heavy seas... problems, difficulties and trials. But it is important that we understand and reflect on the meaning and place of problems in life. Otherwise, we are bound to be terrified like the disciples and start “seeing ghosts” where there is only Jesus “walking on the water”.

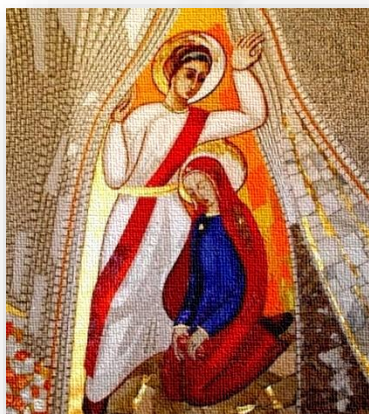


Problems are part of living and growing. They are opportunities for growth and invitations to grow. While we naturally look for solutions to our problems, we know from life’s experience that there are some problems which cannot be solved. In these situations, rather than becoming discouraged, losing faith or complaining, the more healthier and helpful way of looking at problems is to see them as opportunities for growth and invitations to grow. Could it be that when we become too complacent or comfortable that nature – and God – will ‘force’ us to move on by ‘putting a bomb under us’ in the

form of problems? Problems are God's and nature's way of making us grow. They are invitations and reminders of our call to grow.

It is true that some problems are created by ourselves through our own fault, negligence or sheer malice. We may have deviated from God's plan and that's when troubles begin: we lose our way. The problems that come in this way are in reality reminders and warnings that we are on the wrong track or heading in the wrong direction and that we had better retrace our steps and go back to the original path or else we lose our way. The call is to **change** – if not the situation, then oneself. Your change is growth.

There is no doubt that the problem of Covid-19 has seriously **disturbed** us in so many ways. Like the disciples in the midst of the storm, we are frightened and terrified and perhaps even start to see 'ghosts'. But this sort of **disturbance** is an inseparable companion of growing. In growing, we leave one familiar stage where we enjoy 'at-homeness' and enter a new and unfamiliar stage. It is natural to feel lost and disturbed in unfamiliar grounds. But the disturbance is an indication that we have entered a new, higher stage of growth. The disturbance that we suffer when we encounter a problem is a sign that something new and wonderful is taking place or about to take place, namely, that God has entered our life and is going to do something beautiful. Now, when God enters our life, we will be disturbed. Because when God comes into our life, He does so to rearrange it, and rearrangement always brings with it newness and the loss of familiarity. But, when the rearrangement is done by God Himself, we can be sure the result will be beautiful.



We can get assurance of this in the example of Mary. When God entered Mary's life, she too was **disturbed** – “*deeply disturbed*” – according to Luke 1:29. But she was immediately reassured: “*Do not be afraid, Mary. You have found favour in God's eyes...*” (vs. 30). God entered Mary's world to rearrange her life plans; that is why she was disturbed. But the result was even more beautiful than her own already beautiful original plan. She had found favour with God, i.e., she had become God's favourite. Similarly, when we are disturbed by our problems, let us prayerfully reflect and discern God's intervention and find favour in God's eyes.

But problems also bring **pain**, which, like problems, is a sign of growth...either a sign that one is growing, or a sign (a warning) that one must grow. The following story by **Khalil Gibran** (“The Oysters”) makes the point:

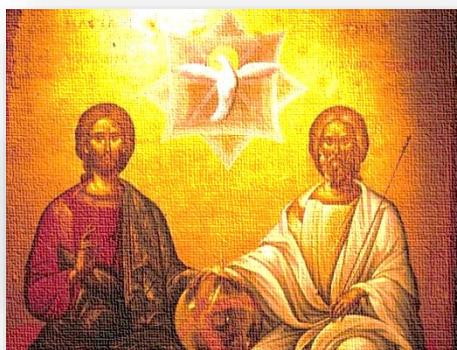
*One day two oysters were conversing on the seashore. The first oyster said to the other, «Woe to me! There is something very heavy and painful within me. I cannot jump, I cannot play.» The second oyster said, «Thanks to the heavens and to the sea! There is nothing heavy and painful within me. I can jump and I can play.» A turtle, which was then passing by, overheard their conversation and said to the second oyster, «Yes, it is true. There is nothing heavy and painful within you, so you can jump and play, while your neighbour – there is something heavy and painful within her, so she cannot jump, she cannot play. But I tell you this: that something heavy and painful within her is the pearl that is growing.»*

The pain caused by the problems that you carry can be a sign that the 'pearl' within you is growing...**you** are growing into a person.

Of course, there are times when problems become overwhelming and the pain is unbearable. In the present situation of the pandemic many people, including ourselves, have found it extremely difficult to cope, to hope and to believe. Perhaps we have complained that God has forsaken us, and precisely when we need Him most. However, the revealed Word of God, and our Passionist spirituality, assures us that there is absolutely no chance of God ever abandoning us, especially in our darkest moments:

*«I shall not forget you.  
Look, I have engraved you  
on the palms of my hands.»*  
(Is.49:15-16)

*«God loved the world so much  
that He gave His only Son  
so that whoever believes in Him  
may not be lost but may have eternal life.»*  
(Jn.3:16)



## KEEP CALM AND STAY POSITIVE.

When the heavy sea and the headwinds become frightening, listen to that voice behind the storm, or from within the storm: *“Courage, it is I. Do not be afraid.”* Or when you find yourself sinking like Peter, cry out like him: *“Lord, save me!”*

- ❖ IN WHAT WAYS CAN THIS CURRENT PROBLEM BE AN OPPORTUNITY FOR GROWTH FOR YOU?
- ❖ IN WHAT WAYS IS GOD ASKING YOU TO GROW BECAUSE OF THIS PROBLEM?
- ❖ CAN YOU FIND IT IN YOU TO THANK GOD FOR THIS PROBLEM, AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR GROWTH?

## **DISTURB US, O LORD**

### **Disturb us, O Lord**

when we are too well-pleased with ourselves;  
when our dreams have come true  
because we dreamed too little;  
when we have arrived in safety  
because we sailed too close to the shore.

### **Disturb us, O Lord**

when with the abundance of things we possess  
we have lost our thirst for the water of life;  
when, having fallen in love with Time,  
we have ceased to dream of Eternity;  
and in our efforts to build new earth  
have allowed our vision for the New Heaven  
to grow dim.

### **Stir us, O Lord**

to dare more boldly,  
to venture on the wider seas,  
where storms shall show Thy Mastery,  
where losing sight of land  
we shall find the stars.  
In the name of Him  
who pushed back the horizons of our hopes  
and invited the brave to follow Him.

**A m e n.**

  
~ Fr. Joachim Rego, C.P.  
Superior General

10 August 2020