

REMAIN STANDING IN THE STORM: Living From Our True Self

It was in 1984 when I have completed my theological studies in the seminary and preparing to be ordained a priest in the month of May of the same year but everything changed as I had to leave my diocese. The situation was like someone who was climbing a hill and almost reached the top of the hill and suddenly fell down to the bottom of the hill. It was like suddenly being caught up in a storm. I could not go back my home. I had no financial support. It was a no way situation. My only strength was my trust in the providence of God. I felt that I had made the decision to be faithful to the Truth that I have discovered. The providence did not abandon me. It opened the door to Shantivanam ashram. Fr. Bede Griffiths who had a great influence in my spiritual growth invited me to the ashram. I had no money except a bicycle which I used for my pastoral work when I was in the seminary. I sold my bicycle and used the money for the train ticket. After reaching the ashram I discovered that I had reached the best place in the world and it was my home since then.

My second important storm was when I went to Italy in 1987 for my studies. The whole culture and theological thinking was too different from my back ground and I was emotionally very vulnerable. The situation put me in a kind of storm, bringing out so many doubts and questions. The only thing that gave me the strength was my trust in the unconditional love of God. The greatest lesson that I learnt was to be flexible. I realized that I was very rigid and unwilling to adopt myself and there was a kind of self-righteousness. Everything that I was holding precious was taken away by the storm and I had to stand in the storm unprotected except by the trust in the love and mercy of God. The trust in God saved me from the storm. Since 20 years I travel to various countries in Europe. Trusting in the providence of God, flexibility and adaptation are the gifts that I carry on my journey. Abraham has become a role model for my journey. He left everything to follow the call of God. His journey was from the known into the unknown. He never had a permanent settlement but lived in tents. When he was taking his son, Isaac, to sacrifice, Isaac asked him, where the sacrificial animal was. Abraham answered, 'my son, the Lord will provide. On the mountain of the Lord everything will be provided'. Making a journey trusting in the providence of God is always an adventurous journey in which I experience the tender care of God's providence in and through the people I meet.

Another important storm was in the year 2000 when I had to leave the ashram to find out what God wants me to do the next. Again like Abraham I had to leave without knowing where I need to proceed. The only thing that gave me strength was my trust in the providence of God. The storms have not ceased to come but they come in a different ways: storms of personal relationships with the members of the community, storms of personal health problems, health problems of family members, storms of losing one's personal reputation, storms of misunderstandings and so on.

Storms can come to us in different ways: losing one's job and financial support, breaking of one's marriage and relationships, facing sudden legal problems, discovering that the children are taking drugs, death of beloved ones, death of children or death of only child or discovering that one is terminally ill

and so on. We all encounter some kind of storms in our lives. Someone said they are only two kinds of people in the world: those who are going through a crisis and those who are going to go through a crisis. Crisis can come to us in different ways and different times but the art of living consists in making our crisis into an opportunity for our spiritual growth or realization. Jesus told the parable of the unjust manager who has been removed from his job. He faced a crisis but he acted wisely and came out of the crisis. (Lk.16.1-13).

Jesus told his disciples, *‘therefore, everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a sensible man who built his house on the rock. Rain came down, floods rose, gales blew and it did not fall: it was founded on rock. But everyone who listens to the words of mine and does not act on them will be like a stupid man who built his house on the sand. Rain came down, floods rose, gales blew and struck that house, and it fell; and what a fall it had (Mt.7.24-27).*

Jesus told the people that they are the light of the world and the salt of the earth.(Mt.5.13) It means that the vocation of human beings is to be the light to the world and to be the salt of the world. The ‘world’ is life of desire that comes from the emptiness of our lives. This emptiness is born of ignorance. We try to fill our emptiness from outside through money, power, position and relationships. We receive our meaning from the world, from outside. The world is our light and our salt. But the vocation of human beings, manifested in the image and likeness of God, is to be the light to the world and to be the salt to the world. Human beings must be the masters of the world and not be slaves of the world. This light is buried within us. We are not aware of it. Jesus said ‘no one lights a lamp and puts it under a tub; they put it on the lamp-stand where it shines for everyone in the house’ (Mt.5.15). This lamp is our true self. It is put under the tub and its light is not visible.

To build our house on the rock means to live our life from our true self, from our fullness, which is our divine self. It can handle the storms of life and remain firm. To build our house on the sand is to live our life from our false self or ignorant self, the self of desire and emptiness. This house cannot survive the storm. The storms that the ignorant self faces can help it to look for the true self. Jesus told the parable of rich fool: *There was once a rich man who, having a had a good harvest from his land, thought to himself, what am I to do? I have not enough room to store my crops”. Then he said, “This is what I will do: I will pull down my barns and build bigger ones, and store all my grain and my goods in them and I will say to my soul, My soul, you have plenty of good things laid by for many years to come, take things easy, eat, drink, have a good time. But God said to him, ‘Fool’ ! This very night the demands will be made for your soul; and this hoard of yours, whose will it be then? So it is when someone stores up treasure for himself instead of becoming rich in the sight of God’ . (Lk.12.16-21).*

When we live from our ignorant self we try to hoard up treasures externally and find security in them. These external securities are not real securities. When death strikes us they are helpless. To be rich in the sight of God is to live from our true self. It does not die even though our physical body dies. The storms that we face in life can help us to discover our true self or to awaken our true self.

Awakening the divine self in times of storms

The disciples of Jesus were going in a boat (Mk. 4.35-41). Jesus was asleep. Suddenly they faced a storm and were afraid and thought that they would perish in the storm. They woke up Jesus and begged him to help them. Jesus woke up and calmed the sea. Jesus is the symbol of our true self hidden in our hearts. Our life is like a journey in a boat on the sea of life. We make our journey in our false self. We are not aware of our true self. It is hidden. It is in a state of sleep. Whenever we face a crisis we may be forced to awaken our true self which saves us from the storms of our life. Every crisis can be an opportunity to awaken our true self hidden in our hearts.

Living From Our True Self

There is an incident in which Jesus comes to his disciples walking on the water. (Mt.14.21-33). Walking on the water is the symbol of living from our true self. It is a state without ego and a complete surrender to God in such a way that we are protected by God and carried by God on his/her palms. Our true self is like a feather. It can float on the waters of desires and it can fly in the air of this world. Our ego is like a stone. However small it may be if we throw it into the water it will be drowned. If we throw it into the sky it will fall down. Our ego needs a boat to make its journey in the waters of this world. Our ego needs a vehicle to make a journey in the world of sky. These vehicles may encounter a storm and meet accidents. Our true self does not need these intermediaries. It is in direct contact with God. Walking on the water is not our action on God but God's action in us. Jesus said, 'I am in the Father and the Father is in me' and 'the works which I do are not my own but the Father who dwells in me does his works'.

We can come to our true self by becoming aware of the un-substantiality of our ignorant self or self of desire and renounce it. Discovering our true self also will enable us to give up our false self. It is like the man who found treasure in the field. He went home sold everything he had and bought that field. It is like the merchant in search of pearls. When he found a pearl of great value he went home sold everything he had and bought that pearl (Mt.13.44-46). Finding our true self gives us great joy. Living from our true self does not guarantee a storm free life but gives us the strength to remain firm and handle the storms that come on the way of our life's journey. Our true self is our life vest that we carry with us always.

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