



Pedro's boat looks like a skiff, a colleague told me recently. Maybe not as much as it seems (we are facing the umpteenth creation of virtual reality) but in any case, is not an image closer to reality than the pomp and triumph of other times? Compared to the big corporations, the mammoth states and the multinationals, the Church may seem like a fragile boat in the middle of the ocean. To think that the course and outcome of history depend on his suffering depends on the fact that he was the Messiah.

I have been asked a lot these days about how Benedict XVI will live the betrayals of his environment, that feeling of dizziness in the Vatican, the tremendous exposure of the body of the Church in the fair of the vanities in which the media have become so many times. I can only look and listen to the Pope, that's enough for me. I know to what extent he knows the filth, the ambition and the desire for power that also prey on those who make up the Church. And it does not ignore the non-negligible scope of the worldly powers that threaten it from without. I also know how often you review history, teacher of life, to get to see with a little irony and a lot of pity the tremendous weaknesses of men. "So great is the man, and so small!" Peguy would say genially.

Lion the Great stood before Attila with no other weapons than his priestly ornaments and stopped the barbarian. And Pius VI died in Valence, prisoner of the French revolutionaries. The strength and weakness of the Church always intertwined, the fragile boat so often about to lose its balance and overturn. A young Joseph Ratzinger warned us in the distant 1970 that "man is an abyss" but "the Church is not only determined by the abyss of man but by the greater, infinite abyss, of God's love". And then the cynics' forecasts can fail, they will surely fail.

It is true that for the sensitivity of this great witness, of this great Father of the Church who is Benedict XVI, the pain of being surrounded by certain miseries must be especially acute. Surely that is what the Pope meant when a few days ago he spoke to the cardinals of the storms of his life; storms for which, in the end, He also found reason to thank the Owner of the Vineyard. How true is what Jesus announced to Peter after the Resurrection, so that no illusions may be made: "*when you are old another will put you in and take you where you do not want to be.*"

The homily of Pentecost has been the gesture of government, the paternal testimony, the word of the truth that the Pope wanted to give to the Church and the world in this bitter hour. Without forcing the gesture, with that restraint that almost disarms, with the luminosity so much that converts a reasoning into a symphony. "*We attend daily events in which we think that men become more aggressive and moodier, understanding seems too difficult and you prefer to stay in your own self, in your own interests ... In this situation, can we truly find and live that unit we are so needy of?*" And Benedict XVI points out that when men try to usurp God's place, they run the risk of not even being men anymore, because they lose the ability to agree, to understand each other and to work together. This can happen in any of our areas and also, of course, in the Vatican.

The wound of men is very deep, well seen by the great geniuses of literature of all time, and with

special despair those of our time. "Unity can exist only as a gift of the Spirit, to give us a new heart and a new language," explains the Pope, and for him it is an experience that is defied in both joy and pain. The Church exists only for this gift that does not list the exchanges and does not suffer the risk premium. This gift that makes cynics smile and that even seems to bore so many Christians, including ecclesiastical ones: "*Don't give me that, you need to act, cleanse, restructure, organize...*".

But the humble worker in the Lord's vineyard insists, "*Only the Spirit guides us to the heights of God, so that we may already live on this earth the germ of the divine life that is in us.*" Thus, Benedict lives in the midst of the storm, with his gaze fixed on the heights of God and his feet well planted in the mud of history. In these agony days he is the living image of the true Church of Jesus and not that market of trinkets in which some try to convert it.