

## A STRESS-FREE LIFE Fr. Varghese Paul, SJ

Life is certainly stressful in our globalized world of internet and instant communication. Depression, tension and other stress related sicknesses have become part and parcel of our lives. For, we dream about having more and more money and wealth and go after them. Amidst this rat race for having more, we also yearn for peace and tranquility. Here Jesus points the way.

In the Gospel according to Mark we have a panacea for a stress-free life. Jesus was often surrounded by large crowds of people. They wanted Jesus all the time to care for their maladies and free them from all their worries. Here the evangelist Mark shows with a simple statement how Jesus coped with such a situation and led a stress-free life.

Mark's statement says, "The crowd was so large that Jesus told his disciples to get a boat ready for him, so that the people would not crush him" (Mk 3, 9).

To understand Jesus' request to his disciples we need to take into consideration the whole context. Jesus has started his public life preaching to the Jewish people in their temple and synagogues. Then, he shifted his venue on hilltops and seashores. He started with making statements like "Turn away from your sins, because the kingdom of heaven is near!" (Mt 4, 17). Then, Jesus turned to nature and took examples from everyday lives of the people. Finally Jesus used parables in his preaching and teaching.

As a result the crowds who came to hear Jesus increased day by day. The crowds who came to hear Jesus and be healed by him increased so much that the Temple or synagogues could no more contain them. So Jesus chose the seashore to speak to the ever-growing number of people.

One day when the mother and cousin brothers of Jesus came to meet him, the crowd of people around Jesus was so great that they could not approach him. So they sent a message to Jesus, "Look, your mother and brothers are standing outside, and they want to speak with you" (Mt 12, 47).

Jesus' response to the request reveals to us the content of Jesus message. In response Jesus pointed to the people around him and said, "Look! Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does what my Father in heaven wants him to do is my brother, my sister, and my mother" (Mt 12, 49-50).

As time passed, even the seashore became small for the enormous crowds of people coming to hear Jesus. Evangelists have taken note of the fact that the open seashore was not enough to contain the large number of people flocking to hear and touch Jesus. Mark writes, "Again Jesus began to teach beside Lake Galilee. The crowd that gathered round him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it. The boat was out in the water, and the crowd stood on the shore at the water's edge. He used parables to teach them many things" (Mk 4, 1-2).

On the seashore people crowded around Jesus to hear him and also to touch and be healed by him. Both Luke and Mark has noted about one such occasion. Luke says "Jesus got into one of

the boats - it belonged to Simon - and asked him to push off a little from the shore. Jesus sat in the boat and taught the crowd” (Lk 5, 3). Mark writes, “The crowd was so large that Jesus told his disciples to get a boat ready for him so that people would not crush him” (Mk 3, 9).

Jesus’ request to his disciple ‘to get a boat ready’ speaks volumes about him and the concrete ground situation. Jesus sees that the people are crowding and making effort to reach and touch him. He knows that even if he stays twenty-four hours with the people, there will be no end to it. So Jesus spends all the time possible for him to proclaim God’s kingdom to the people and to heal them.

Jesus also knows his own needs and his own limitations as a fully human person. He is aware that in daily living he needs some time for himself. Similarly he needs time to spend with his disciples and friends. Taking all these things into consideration, amidst proclaiming God’s kingdom and healing people, Jesus tells his disciples to get a boat ready for him.

However much people crowd around, Jesus knows that he needs time to be away from the people so that he can spend time alone to commune with his Father in prayer. He also wants time to spend with his disciples and other friends and to rest. This is possible only by going away from the people for a while. With these consideration Jesus has said to his disciples to get a boat ready for him.

Personally speaking, I often make a list of things to do in a particular day. Sometimes the list is long. Then I prioritize the list according to the urgency and importance of things listed. Then, even when the works do not get over by 7.45 PM, I just stop the work, close the office and head for home for supper and rest. Similarly by 11 PM, I go to bed even if urgent reading and writing are incomplete. Jesus’ example is helpful to me in this to see that my works and hobbies of reading and writing do not control me but I do.

Jesus through his life and message shows to me that, for him what is of supreme importance is fulfilling the wishes of his Father. So Jesus spends time alone in prayer to seek and know the will of his Father. We see Jesus meeting this need by retiring to lonely places either late at nights or early in the mornings.

When Jesus received the shocking news of the beheading of John the Baptist, his reaction is to go to a lonely place. Mathew writes, “When Jesus heard the news about John, he left there in a boat and went to a lonely place by himself” (Mt 14,13). On another occasion when, impressed by the miracles, the people wanted to make Jesus their king, Jesus disappears from their midst. John writes, “Jesus knew that they were about to come and seize him in order to make him king by force; so he went off again to the hills by himself” (Jn 6, 15).

These incidents of Jesus’ life tell us that the purpose of Jesus’ life on earth is to seek and do the will of God the Father. Everything else fades into insignificance. So Jesus can see all things in their true perspective and do everything accordingly with balance of mind and poise.

When we look around we see tired and depressed faces instead of faces with joy and vitality. Everyone is rushing after one thing or other! Some people may be spending all their time and

energy after their business or profession. Others may be spending their lives after power and fame. I am not speaking about people who work with dedication to achieve their specific goals. But there are people who madly rush after their goals neglecting everything else like their wives, children, friends and even their own health. They lead such tensed and stressful lives that they are actually wasting their lives in the mad pursuit of their goals!

It is in such a situation that we can draw lessons from Jesus who tells his disciples to keep a boat ready for him. In the most engaged life we need to keep our balance of mind and poise. We need to earn money. We need to do our jobs with commitment and dedication. We need to improve our business or other occupations. With all these engagements we need also to have time for ourselves. It is a person's own duty and responsibility to keep the balance of life.

Each one of us needs the boat, which Jesus has asked his disciples to keep ready. That boat means in our busy lives, we find quality time for ourselves and for our family and friends. That boat means that we need to find time for other people who need our help or our times like the old and sick people. That boat means that we need to find time to help the less privileged people like the poor and delinquent people. That boat means that we need the time to ourselves to spend in prayer and devotions. That boat means rest and inactivity time for ourselves in the company of others or alone.

So let us keep our boat always ready taking inspiration from Jesus.

Let us also remember that like Jesus needed his disciples, we too need our family and friends to navigate our boat through rough waters of life. If we try to lead such a balanced life with poise, then tensions and depressions will disappear from our lives. Our life-boat will move ahead with ease even in rough waters with Jesus as an unseen fellow traveller. (contact the author: [ciss@satyam.net.in](mailto:ciss@satyam.net.in))