

REFLECTION IN A WINDLESS HOUR

Living a cloistered life in a cell on Death Row has its advantages it allows for reflection. I think about what can be said to sum up my feelings about this place. While God is ever present, still it occurs to me that, for many people, such a life seems to make everything grow stale. The world passes by, yet we remain stationary. For some people even faith grows stale, like a flat soda drink lacks fizz, as if the internal energy has evaporated. The faith is still there but a certain vibrancy may be missing. I sometimes equate this place to a Sixteen Century sailing vessel -- all masts and sailcloth, out in the middle of an ocean a thousand leagues from anywhere -- and no wind. "Dead in the water," as the sailors say: "stuck in the doldrums."

Then I ask myself what the sailors would do, stranded in a sea of water flat as a window pane, lacking even a breath of wind. It occurs to me that the crew would remain active -- clean the ship, patch the sails, or perhaps carve intricate designs into a walrus tusk or whale bone as a gift for a loved one back home. The crew would stay busy in productive pursuits, knowing the wind will pick up again in time. This leads me to understand that I, too, can make good use of this "down time", these windless hours. Like a deckhand cleans the ship, I can polish up my heart and soul while I wait. Like a ship's tailor mends his sails, I can patch and mend broken personal relationships. And like ivory gifts made in honour of loved ones, I can pass forward the gifts of the love of Jesus and our Blessed Mother to all I encounter. I can view this time as an opportunity to develop a closer relationship with Christ and His Sorrowful Mother, who hold me safe in their Hearts. The wind will fill my sails again, in time.

COME NOW A HOLY WIND

My ship stand still in a windless hour
yet it troubles me not.

A sea like glass allows an unbroken
reflection of Heaven
Thus I am twice-blessed.

My heart knows that a windless hour
shall not ever so remain ... it is
a gift of a moment's solitude
given to refresh my soul.

My love grows strongest in a windless hour

becalmed in the Heart of Mary.
Send now, Mother, a Holy Wind
to stir my soul anew.

My soul foresees God in a windless hour
approaching me with endless love ...
Breathe forth life into my soul
that I may sail home
to the Heart of Jesus.

In the March 2006 edition of VITA Più Magazine we read about the passing of Sr. Maria Ho, Fdccc, the last Canossian sister who remained in China under the Communist regime. Surely this sister, who spent half a century bottled up within a totalitarian State designed to stamp out the knowledge of the existence of God, surely Sister Maria built a profound trust in God in such a crushing circumstance. We too can find trust in God in our windless hours, the times when our mission seems to encounter every manner of roadblock, when new vocations seem slow in coming, or in a depressed moment when a sense of spiritual dryness can seemingly restrain our progress towards sanctity. Corrupt governments stifle efforts to provide for their poor. The physical limitations of aging may frustrate our intentions. Prisoners can find themselves alone in their Christian beliefs. All of us can find ourselves with a lack of wind in our sails at some point. Yet we can take these windless hours in stride, secure in the knowledge that God is simply gifting us with a quiet time in which to draw nearer to Him.

I like to think that Sr. Maria knew in her beautiful heart a complete trust in God during her own windless hours, finding a kindred spirit in the words of St. Teresa of Jesus:

Let nothing trouble you/ Let nothing frighten you
Everything passes/ God never changes
Patience/ obtains all
Whoever has God/ Wants for nothing
God alone is enough.

By Jeffrey Dale Tiner

- St. Teresa of Jesus, Poesias 30, in *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, Vol. III, translated by K. Kavanaugh, OCD, and O. Rodriguez, OCD (Washington D.C. : Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1985), 386 no. 9, translated by John Wall; CCC 227 n.52

