

Love the Lord your God with all your heart...

Written after sailing Viking II, a Farr 38, back from Rio de Janeiro after the 2000 Cape to Rio Race

As Mrs van Rensburg of Pit-Sonder-Water said to Mr van Rensburg when they arrived in Hondeklipbaai and saw the sea for the first time: “Jislaaik, Gawie, maar dis ‘n m-----se groot dam daai, wee’ jy!” You only actually realise or internalise *how* big it is when you view it from the deck of a 38 foot yacht after 12 days and nights at sea - and you’re only half way to Rio, with some 1 700 nautical miles (3 200 kilometres) still to go!

“ But what do you *do* for the 25 days and 25 nights at sea?” is a question I have been asked – and in fact, asked myself before the race. Well of course, sailing the yacht, eating and sleeping takes up a fair amount of each 24 hours, but the fact is that, after about 3 days, one goes into a different “time zone”. That is the only way I can describe it. One comes out of our modern day “rat race time zone” and into the “timeless zone” of our Lord God. In the middle of the ocean in a small boat you are in His space. So when one is not actively involved in sailing, eating or sleeping one can absorb the immensity of that space, and through that, His presence. Not that I had a “Damascus road” experience – far from it. But I did have what were for me two major insights, one during the race and one on the return trip. And as I am writing this article during Holy Week it seems appropriate to share my second insight with you first (I will share the other with you next month). It has to do with “worship”, but first I must set the scene:

The return trip was a long one – 30 days and 30 nights long. Geoff, whose yacht it is, and I – just the two of us - left Rio on 28th February and headed south to pick up the westerly trade winds, which worked like clockwork until we were about 200 nm (a day and a half’s sailing) away from Tristan da Cunha, when two things happened. First, the autohelm packed up and second, the wind swung into the SE and drove us north for 3 days. During this time the port inner shroud broke and I had to go up the mast twice to attach the rear anchor chain in its place. Pretty hectic in 25 knots of wind, rain and 2m swells!

After 3 days the wind moderated and swung north and we set off for Cape Town again, heading south as much as possible to cater for the SE winds we expected closer to CT.

We were still some 250 nautical miles (460 km) west of Cape Town when a gale force south easter (45 knots plus) came up and blew us north past CT (you may remember the SE gale that came up on 25th March). It was during this period that the starboard shroud broke and I had to go up the mast again to secure the forward anchor chain as a replacement shroud - all in all I had to go up the mast 4 times during the voyage. At one stage we thought we’d have to go in to Luderitz or Walvis Bay because we literally could not make any south at all. It makes one appreciate what the likes of Columbus and Vasco da Gama went through!

Well, on Tuesday morning 28th March, having hove to for Monday night because the wind and seas were huge (60 knots plus and 10 to 15 metres high), we decided to motor-sail as best we could eastwards. We were then 193 miles from Saldanha, but could not lay it because of the wind direction, and the wind was too strong to motor directly into it – we had to motor-sail. But we figured that we would at least be closer to help should we need it. So we motor-sailed the whole day and on into Tuesday night. And then, wonder of wonders, at about 23h30, towards the end of my watch (we did 6 hours turn and turn about, mine being from 0600 to 1200 and 1800 to 2400) the wind started swinging into the south, and by 02h00 on Geoff’s watch the wind had swung south and we could lay Saldanha Bay. Which we entered at around 15h00 on Wednesday 29th March, finally mooring at Mykonos at 16h00, with only about 25 litres - or 70 miles worth - of diesel left. Solid ground, my wife and ice cold beers – what a joy!

So you can imagine from the brief description above that the return trip had a few difficult moments which, with only two of us on board, made relations at times somewhat tense! Not only did we have the bad weather to contend with but for the second half of the trip there was no autohelm and the constant worry that the mast would come down – and with it our main source of motive power (the sails) plus our communications with the outside world (the radio aerials are atop the mast).

Which is why I had to chuckle one day when I opened my “Every Day with Jesus” to see that the reading for the next few days had to do with “love thy neighbour”! Sheesh. A tough call in these circumstances, I thought. I’m not sure how well I did overall – there were times when I could cheerfully have strangled Geoff and, I am sure, vice versa! – but we are still talking to each other, which is a good sign! But out of this general theme I started thinking about the love of God and agape love in general – I had just read “The Road Less Travelled” by M. Scott Peck – and then my thoughts went full circle and settled on the reciprocal love of man for God.

“But most of the time we talk about ‘worshipping’ God”, I thought, interpreting “worship” to be liturgy and procedures. And then it struck me: of course...to “worship” *is* to “love”, except that I suddenly realised it is much more than that!

The Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary defines the verb “worship” as: “to pay divine honours to; *to adore or idolise*; to honour, respect, treat with signs of honour”; The same dictionary defines the verb “adore” as: “to worship; *to love or reverence intensely*”. (my italics).

How many of us actually do this? How many of us can honestly say that we *adore* Jesus and God our Father? I don’t believe that I can, as much as I would like to. Because there can be no doubt, particularly over Easter, that He adores *us*. After all, He sent His only Son to die the most painful and ghastly death for our sins on our behalf. And since God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are One, that means that God Himself came down to earth knowing that He was going to die on that cross for us. That took enormous courage as a “mortal” man, and indescribable love both as mortal man and as God. The word “adore” pales by comparison, but it is this best that I can come up with.

So now my focus is on loving Jesus and God our Father as best I can, and with the help of the Holy Spirit I hope to get better at it. Perhaps one day I will be able to truthfully say, “Lord Jesus, my Saviour and Friend, I do worship you”. In the meantime there is encouragement for us all in these words, published in the pew leaflet last year:

*Lord, beneath all the concerns on the surface of my mind, I
long to be in close communion with You.
Even when my desire for You is swamped by many preoccupations,
I still know in my heart
that I need You more than anything else.*

*The Lord says, “ You are my beloved friend,
and nothing can take that away from you.
I was the one who planted in you this longing for me,
like a seed in the earth.*

*The very fact that you are turning to me now
shows that your desire for me has been growing,
even if you did not realise it.
Your very desire is itself prayer.*

*Remember that I made you in my image –
so your yearning for me
reflects my great longing for you.*

*In silence I reach out to God,
in this mystery of mutual desire.*