

Homily for the 19th Sunday in Ordinary Time, A, August 9, 2020

This has been a rough time for us as we continue to be cloistered due to the coronavirus. The theme for our mass today should be helpful. How do we face the challenges we encounter in life? Our readings today give us some examples from the scriptures of how some of the great Biblical heroes handled the struggles and challenges in their lives. *However, to begin with, we can't presume that if we have faith we will just sail through life, for faith does not shield us from the risks and challenges of daily living. But faith does help us to overcome them.*

First, we look at the Prophet Elijah, a true man of God. In our reading today he is fleeing for his life as Queen Jezebel has sent out her armies to kill him. We find him, far from home, hiding for his life in a cave in the desert on Mount Horeb. He is a broken man just waiting to die. He complains to God and God replies by asking him to come out of his cave to meet him. First Elijah hears a mighty *wind* but God was not in the wind. Next he feels an *earthquake* but God was not in the earthquake. Then, he sees a *terrifying fire* but God was not in the fire. Finally, Elijah hears a **tiny whisper** and in the whisper he finds God.

What have we learned from this scene? I think it is a reminder that we meet God not in the noisy world we live in, but in stillness and quiet. I think we meet God in the most hidden parts of our being and in the promptings of our conscience especially when we meet God in our prayers.

In our second reading, we feel the anguish of St. Paul. Despite all his success in converting the Gentiles to Christianity he is disappointed that he cannot touch the hearts of his own countrymen. Paul's love for them is so deep that he wishes he could be cut off from Christ for the sake of his people. And we

know how close Paul was to Christ because he tells us *“For me to live is Christ.”*

Here we must admit that often what we want to do with our lives is not what God wants for us.

In our Gospel we are presented one more time with what is one of Matthew’s favorite themes: *“Grace conquers fear.”* Jesus has just fed 5000 people and now Jesus wants to go off by himself in prayer and he asks his disciples to leave the area and go home by boat so that he could pray privately. They leave by boat but soon a storm arises. Jesus approaches them walking on the water. He tells them: *“It is I, do not be afraid.”* Incredibly, Jesus then invites Peter to get out of the boat and join him. At first Peter also walks on the water but when he gets frightened Peter begins to sink. He cries out and Jesus catches him and says: *“O ye, of little faith, why do you doubt me?”* Following Jesus command Peter gets into the boat and the wind dies down. *Here we learn to just trust Jesus.*

When we put all these scenes together what have we learned?

As Christians we have to leave our so-called securities behind us. Like Elijah we have to leave the security of the cave. Like Paul we must accept the realities we face in life some of his people are not going to become followers of Jesus. And like Peter we must risk the safety of staying in the boat. We have to venture out into the full fury of our own life’s challenges and storms. We know we can do this because the same God who comforted Elijah, calmed the anxieties of Paul and summoned Peter to join him in the water – remains with us today, challenging us to do the same. We may sink a few times in the process but *we can rely on God to teach us to face our challenges and to walk on water, too!*