

August 10, 2014

Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Introduction to the First Reading: The prophet Elijah had been promised a visit by God himself, but he was surprised by just how it came about. God was not in the violent wind. He was not in the powerful earthquake. He was not in the fire. He turned out to be in the gentlest whispering breeze. Often that's also how God comes to us. It's when we get away from all the noise and distraction and sit quietly with him that he whispers silently within us.

Reading 1 [1 Kgs 19:9a, 11-13a](#)

At the mountain of God, Horeb,
Elijah came to a cave where he took shelter.
Then the LORD said to him,
“Go outside and stand on the mountain before the LORD;
the LORD will be passing by.”
A strong and heavy wind was rending the mountains
and crushing rocks before the LORD—
but the LORD was not in the wind.
After the wind there was an earthquake—
but the LORD was not in the earthquake.
After the earthquake there was fire—
but the LORD was not in the fire.
After the fire there was a tiny whispering sound.
When he heard this,
Elijah hid his face in his cloak
and went and stood at the entrance of the cave.

Responsorial Psalm [Ps 85:9, 10, 11-12, 13-14](#)

R/ (8) Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation.

I will hear what God proclaims;
the LORD — for he proclaims peace.
Near indeed is his salvation to those who fear him,
glory dwelling in our land.

R/ Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation.

Kindness and truth shall meet;
justice and peace shall kiss.
Truth shall spring out of the earth,
and justice shall look down from heaven.

R/ Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation.

The LORD himself will give his benefits;
our land shall yield its increase.
Justice shall walk before him,
and prepare the way of his steps.

R/ Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation.

Introduction to the Second Reading: Speaking to the Romans St. Paul shares one of the deepest wounds of his heart. He's terribly distressed that most of his people, the Jewish people, have not accepted Jesus. He says that he would be willing to give up his own heaven, his own eternal happiness if that's what it would take to bring them to Jesus.

Reading 2 [Rom 9:1-5](#)

Brothers and sisters:
I speak the truth in Christ, I do not lie;
my conscience joins with the Holy Spirit in bearing me witness
that I have great sorrow and constant anguish in my heart.
For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ
for the sake of my own people,
my kindred according to the flesh.
They are Israelites;
theirs the adoption, the glory, the covenants,
the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises;
theirs the patriarchs, and from them,
according to the flesh, is the Christ,
who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

Gospel [Mt 14:22-33](#)

After he had fed the people, Jesus made the disciples get into a boat
and precede him to the other side,
while he dismissed the crowds.
After doing so, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray.
When it was evening he was there alone.
Meanwhile the boat, already a few miles offshore,
was being tossed about by the waves, for the wind was against it.
During the fourth watch of the night,
he came toward them walking on the sea.
When the disciples saw him walking on the sea they were terrified.
“It is a ghost,” they said, and they cried out in fear.
At once Jesus spoke to them, “Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid.”
Peter said to him in reply,
“Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.”
He said, “Come.”
Peter got out of the boat and began to walk on the water toward Jesus.
But when he saw how strong the wind was he became frightened;
and, beginning to sink, he cried out, “Lord, save me!”
Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and caught Peter,
and said to him, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?”
After they got into the boat, the wind died down.
Those who were in the boat did him homage, saying,
“Truly, you are the Son of God.”

Homily: Today's Gospel is about Jesus and Peter walking on the water. What a weird miracle! Why did he do it? What spiritual message is he trying to teach us?

It helps if we look at the context. What happened right before this? St. Matthew puts it right after the multiplication of the loaves and fishes. Do you remember? About 30,000 or more people had followed Jesus to a deserted place and listened to him preach. Finally the Apostles urged him to send them away so that they could get something to eat. Probably they were really hungry too. Then Jesus did something strange. He asked the impossible. He said: "Why don't you give them something to eat?" They actually tried. They checked everyone for food and came up with five barley loaves and two fish that one boy had and was willing to share. That's all Jesus needed. He multiplied the loaves and fishes and fed them all. They stuffed themselves and still had 12 full baskets left over.

The message here was clear. Do whatever you can even if it seems impossibly inadequate, and trust Jesus, and he will take care of the rest. You'll have all you need. He can take five barley loaves and two fishes and feed 30,000 people. He can take all the scrap paper in your house and turn it into \$1000 bills. Trust Him, and do what you can, and don't worry.

Now what about walking on the water? What exactly did Jesus say to Peter when he rescued him? "Oh you of little faith, why did you doubt?" Doubt what? What Jesus had said first: "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid." That's the key to understanding this whole thing. "Do not be afraid." What were the Apostles afraid of? Believe it or not they were afraid of the water. They were fishermen. The water looks so nice and beautiful. It is. But fishermen above all know how treacherous it can be. They had lost boats and equipment in storms. They had lost friends and family members who had drowned. The most feared creatures on earth were the great monsters that lived in the sea.

Jesus said: "Do not be afraid." He himself was dancing on the waves. Peter got it. He said: "If it's really true command me to come to you on the water." Jesus said: "Come." And Peter did. It was only when he began to be afraid again that he began to sink. Jesus saw how well he had done and said: "Why did you doubt?"

What are we afraid of? What keeps us awake at night? What is the source of our stress? What gives us ulcers? It's fear. What are we afraid of? Jesus can easily take care of it. But notice something very important here. Most of our prayers to Jesus are asking him to take away the thing that we are afraid of. That's not what he did with Peter. Peter was afraid of the water. Jesus didn't take away the water. Rather he taught Peter how to conquer his fear of the water. When Peter fully trusted Jesus he was no longer afraid of the water and then the water had no more power over him! He could now walk on the water.

Our fears have power over us. Jesus tells us: "Do not be afraid." He doesn't take away what makes us afraid. But when we trust him and his love for us he teaches us how to conquer our fears. Then our fears will no longer have any power over us. With Jesus at our side we will walk on the water.