

Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – August 13, 2017– Good Shepherd Parish

Scripture Reading: 1 Kings 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.

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.

Scripture Reading: Romans 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: Matthew 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."



Memorare

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, or sought thine intercession was left unaided.

Inspired by this confidence, I fly unto thee, O Virgin of virgins, my mother; to thee do I come, before thee I stand, sinful and sorrowful. O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions, but in thy mercy hear and answer me.

Amen.

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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

Normally the Gospel for last week tells news of John the Baptist's death, which hit Jesus hard. He took a boat to a deserted place in order to grieve, quietly, by himself. The crowd had watched him go. But they tracked him down and got to that place on foot, before him! When he arrived, their many needs pressed him into service immediately. So, instead of the hushed time for grief that he needed, Jesus' heart was moved by the suffering people that faced him. He spent hour after hour, healing and curing—and feeding the five thousand. This story was omitted last week because the Church, for a number of reasons, mostly numerical, celebrated instead the feast of the Transfiguration. Fine, but this week's Gospel is much clearer if you know how it follows the previous one, so I have filled in the missing part of the story above!

Which brings us to this Sunday. In the Gospel, Jesus at last sends the crowd away and notice a strange thing, usually ignored. After feeding the five thousand, he "made the disciples get into a boat and precede him to the other side." But why send them ahead? Why should he stay there alone? The probable answer is easy. Among other things, he needed to be by himself to process John's death, which had moved him so much. So he climbed up on a mountainside and took plenty of time to commune with his heavenly Father. By now it was evening, and he prayed well into the night. A gusty wind came up. He could not have been comfortable. Neither could the disciples, who were trying to hold their boat on course in the wind. We would love to know the character of Jesus' prayer. He had studied scriptures since his youth, so maybe the story of Elijah in our First Reading had come to mind. There, the prophet also was on a mountain-side, and there too, a heavy wind came up. We are told that the Lord was not in the wind, nor in the earthquake that followed, nor in the fire that came next. The Lord God was in the "still, small voice" that came last.*

Fast forward. Jesus surely also heard such a voice. Even though his trust was bruised by John's death, maybe he was letting his Abba refresh it. He let his very personal loss be touched, even after caring for so many poor ones. What do we learn? All human beings have to rely on God, especially when it seems that tragedy has the upper hand. Maybe Jesus, even Jesus, was learning that divine love stays in the deepest realm of the soul, and needs a quiet time to emerge. Could this be an example of how he "learned obedience through what he suffered"(Hebrews 5:8)? Did he now possess again what the rest of us humans have to learn, that trust is not a sheer act of the will, not simply a blind decision, but a quiet emergence of God's faithful love. Now Jesus walked on water to the disciples, who were still at sea. How must it have felt to leave solid ground and walk on mere liquid? Perhaps this walking is symbolic of the kind of trust that had been with him throughout his life. It was such a symbol for Peter.

* I love this older translation of the words, with more symbolism in English, rather than the present way of rendering it, "A tiny whispering sound," which sacrifices metaphor for accuracy.

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. Some of us have to have a "great wind," an "earthquake," or a "fire" in our lives before we look for God. But do you ever take time to listen for the "tiny whispering sound"? Could you if you created a quiet time in your life each day?
2. Paul is in "great sorrow and constant anguish" because some of his own people, the Israelites, have not accepted the fact that the Messiah has come. Is this because he wishes the best for them and would even sacrifice himself to help them? What do you do when your loved ones reject some beliefs that are important to you?
3. "Peter was walking toward Jesus and doing fine. What caused him to suddenly sink? What causes you to move away from your "leap of faith"? What do you think would have helped Peter stay afloat? What might help you?

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

Almighty ever-living God, whom, taught by the Holy Spirit, we dare to call our Father, bring, we pray, to perfection in our hearts the spirit of adoption as your sons and daughters, that we may merit to enter into the inheritance which you have promised. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen