

## Homily of Nineteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time of Year A, 2023

1 Kings 19:9a, 11-13a; Psalm 85:9-14; Romans 9:1-5; Matthew 14:22-33

Today's gospel is about Jesus walking on water. There is a joke that the following day after Jesus walked on water, his disciples bragged to the disciples of the Pharisees that their master, Jesus, was the greatest of all masters because he walked on water. The disciples of the Pharisees told the Pharisees the latest miracle Jesus performed. The Pharisees, scornfully, replied that there was nothing special about Jesus walking on water; that he walked on water because he did not know how to swim! Many of us are guilty of never acknowledging anything good in people we do not like.

In the first reading, Elijah escaped from Jezebel who wanted to kill him. Scripture says that it took Elijah forty days and forty nights to reach Mount Horeb, the Mountain of God. He went into a cave and took shelter. God did not say, "Welcome, my good and faithful servant;" rather, God put Elijah to further test. God said to him, "Go outside and stand on the mountain before the Lord, the Lord will be passing by." When Elijah stood on the mountain, a strong and heavy wind came rending the mountain and crushing rocks. This was followed by an earthquake, and after the earthquake was a fire. Elijah remained where God told him to stand. It was after the fire that God's presence descended in a tiny whispering sound, and God sent Elijah to another phase of mission.

The following points are worth noting:

First, when things were going rough for Elijah, he went looking for God. Elijah made the rough and long journey to the Mountain of God to meet God.

Second, Elijah remained steadfast and persevered during the strong and heavy wind, the earthquake, and the fire.

Third, Elijah was not reluctant to continue another mission God sent him, not minding his disappointments and frustrations.

In the second reading, St. Paul voiced out his frustration, "... 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 people, my kindred according to the flesh" (Romans 9:2-3). Elijah voiced out similar frustration while on his way to Mount Horeb, "Elijah went a day's journey into the wilderness, until he came to a solitary broom tree and sat beneath it. He prayed for death: "Enough, Lord! Take my life, for I am no better than my ancestors" (1 Kings 19:4).

In one way or another, we are all going through strong and heavy wind, earthquake, fire, and heartbreaking frustrations, as were Elijah and Paul. Paul suffered "imprisonments, far worse beatings, and numerous brushes with death" (see 2 Corinthians 11:23-28). These great fathers of faith teach us to have unwavering faith in God, patience, and perseverance. They teach us not to give up but to press on. They teach us to make a fresh start if that is the way to go.

In the gospel, the boat the apostles were travelling with "was being tossed by the waves, for the wind was against it." It was also night, and they were miles away from offshore. In their fear, they did not recognize Jesus. They thought he was a ghost and became more terrified. Jesus said to them, "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid." Many of us can relate to the experience of the apostles. Many of us are afraid for one reason or another. For some people, it is night, and there appears to be a smell of death. Jesus says, "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid."

We can, also, relate to Peter's experience. Many times, we desire to follow Jesus. In fact, we start off very well. But when strong wind arises in the form of trials and temptations, we doubt, lose faith, forget Jesus who is walking with us, and direct our focus on the trials and temptations. Then, like Peter, we sink into the trials and temptations.

Sometimes, God does not divide the sea for us to walk through on dry ground. Rather, according to God's divine plan, he leaves us to walk several miles on water to get to the shore. Only faith and perseverance sustain us and keep us afloat while we walk on the water.

In times of strong and heavy wind, earthquake, and fire or tossed by waves in the sea, may Jesus stretch his hand, catch us, and save us.

Let us conclude with Psalm 18:5-6, 8, 7.

"The cords of death encompassed me; the torrents of destruction terrified me. The cords of Sheol encircled me; the snares of death lay in wait for me. The earth rocked and shook; the foundations of the mountains trembled [and] shook ... In my distress I called out: Lord! I cried out to my God. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry to him reached his ears."

Amen.

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