

Homily of Nineteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year A, 2026

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

In the first reading, Elijah escaped from Jezebel who wanted to kill him. It took Elijah forty days and forty nights to reach Mount Horeb, the Mountain of God. (Mount Horeb is called the Mountain of God because it was the site of profound divine encounters by Moses with God. On this mountain, Moses experienced the Burning Bush and received the Ten Commandments). Elijah 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, "Come and stand on the mountain before the Lord, the Lord will be passing by." (It sounds like God said, "You are on my mountain. Come out of your fear, dejection, and hiding, and experience me as Moses did. You can't experience me hiding in a cave!"). 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 the earthquake followed by 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. Then, God sent Elijah to another phase of mission (1 Kings 19:14-18).

The following points are worth noting:

First, when things were going rough for Elijah, he went looking for God. He made the rough and long journey to the Mountain of God. In difficult times, we are to go to God, not go away from God.

Second, God called Elijah out of the cave means that God called Elijah and calls us out from hiding, withdrawal, despair, self-pity, and fear to strength and purpose.

Third, God was not in the strong and heavy wind, the earthquake, and the fire but in a tiny whispering sound means that many times, God is found beyond noise and beyond loud dramas.

Fourth, Elijah was not reluctant to continue another mission God sent him, not minding his disappointments and frustrations. Despite our disappointments and frustrations, if it is God's will that we are to start a new journey or mission, all we have to do is to pray for the grace that we need.

In the second reading, St. Paul expressed 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). St. Paul was willing to sacrifice anything, even his own salvation, if such would bring salvation to his people. Elijah voiced similar frustration while on his way to Mount Horeb and 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 all go through strong and heavy winds, earthquakes, fires, and heartbreaking frustrations, as Elijah and Paul did. These great fathers of faith teach us to persevere during troubled times and to have unwavering faith in God. They teach us not to despair and give up but to press forward. They teach us to make a fresh start if that is the way to go.

Today's gospel is about Jesus walking on water. There is a joke that the following day after Jesus walked on water, his disciples boasted 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 Jesus 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 gospel, Jesus left his disciples and went up on the mountain by himself to pray. It was night. The disciples' boat was being tossed by the waves, for the wind was against it. They were miles away from offshore. In their fear, they did not recognize Jesus. They thought he was a ghost and became more terrified. Many of us can relate to the disciples' experience. Some of us are so frightened by issues in our lives that we see ghosts instead of feeling the presence of Jesus. Some of us feel like being tossed up and down by waves of life. For some of us, things are as dark as if it is night. For some of us, the shore is not in sight. Jesus says to us as he said to the disciples, "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid."

At Peter's request and Jesus' invitation, Peter walked on water. But quickly, Peter doubted and looked away from Jesus. Peter turned his attention to the strong wind. He became frightened and began to sink. During strong winds of trials and temptations, we are encouraged to look upon Jesus and to call upon him, instead of seeking solutions outside Jesus. Away from Jesus, we sink and drown. As we remain steadfast in times of strong winds, earthquakes, fires, and tossed by waves, may we hear God's reassuring "tiny whispering sound." May Jesus bring calm to our troubled situations and save us. Amen.

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