

Homily For the 19th Sunday in Ordinary Time- Year A

St. Peter's Sun. 10/12/5 Masses - August 9, 2020

1 Kings 19:9-13 "Go and stand on the mountain, for the Lord is about to pass by, in sheer silence."

Psalms 85:8-13 "God will speak to his people. His salvation is at hand for those who fear him."

Rom 9:1-5 "To my kindred, according to flesh, belong the patriarchs and from them comes the Christ."

Matt 14:22-33 "Jesus reached out and caught him: You of little faith. Why did you doubt?"

Worthy of Our Trust

Introduction

An old joke goes something like this: The most important things in dealing with people are honesty and sincerity. Once you can fake those, you've got it made.

In the Charlie Brown cartoons, there is a scene where Charlie asks Lucy to hold a football for him to run up and kick it. But Lucy pulls the ball away at the last second and Charlie lands hard on his behind. Apparently, there are 37 cartoon strips where Lucy pulled the ball from Charlie Brown. Each time, she convinces him of her sincerity and that he can trust her one more time. Today, we have a *new* opportunity to challenge ourselves with the *old* question: **Do I trust God?**

When talking to people about faith, I often get the impression that, to some, it looks like God amuses himself by messing with us. This may even be a reason to reject faith. Faith needs trust - like that of a child who leaps into his mother or father's arms without a care in the world, without worrying whether he or she will be caught.

If you don't have that trust that God won't play tricks on you at those moments when you are vulnerable, then your faith is likely to be somewhat fragile. At those moments, then, one is likely to hear what Peter heard our Lord say to him: O, you of little faith. Why did you doubt?

This really was a serious issue for the first people to whom God chose to reveal himself - the Israelites. All the nations had their gods. They were used to gods you

could never be sure of. You could never trust their motives. They changed their minds. They were self centred. They demanded sacrifices, sometimes even the children of the people who worshipped them.

We are the new people of Israel and those gods are still around today. Most have a presence on the internet. They are still demanding that we sacrifice our children to them. They still cannot be trusted. The task of figuring out what can be trusted is like being in a storm with the wind raging around us and we have to discern to what we should listen and where we should look.

In today's passages, we see key moments in salvation history. God shows himself to Elijah, the greatest prophet of old, to Peter and the Apostles, and to the members of the Body of Christ, the Church today.

God Shows Himself To Elijah

Elijah was in danger and on the run after a great demonstration of God's power over nature and over the fake god Baal. His faith was fragile. Even he needed reassuring. He was waiting for God to show himself. Maybe God was in a violent wind storm. No, fooled you. Maybe God was in an earthquake. Just kidding. What about a fire. Maybe that's where God is. Gotcha again.

I don't know if Elijah was thinking those things. What he learned though, is that, while God has total power over the forces of nature that he created, he does not depend on them to show himself. He is absolutely independent of his creation. We experience God in nature. God comes to us in nature, like a sunset. But, even when nothing is happening in nature, God is fully and profoundly present. That's what Elijah discovers. God comes in absolute peaceful calm, in a still small voice.

God Shows Himself In Jesus

Jesus had his own storm to deal with. Remember that he had just heard that John the Baptist had been executed and Jesus was trying to get some alone time to pray and grieve, to find that calm in the presence of the Father. But people wanted him and he responded. Now, after feeding the 5000, he is taking that time and so send the rest of the disciples out on to the sea.

But they get caught in a storm so persistent that they spend the entire night, right to the dawn, battling for their lives. It is as violent a weather event as those Elijah experienced. They would have been exhausted. Just as for Elijah, God is not in the wind they are battling, at least not until Jesus came calmly to them right in the middle of the wind and waves.

To calm their fears, Jesus calls out: *It is I*. The words he uses could just as easily be translated: *I am*. This is the divine name, given by God to Moses at the burning bush. This is his identity. He is the great I am, the source of all existence and nature. Jesus walking on the water is not a special effect or a trick. Jesus is not overcoming the storm or gravity. It is not a super power he is using. He is outside of the forces of nature

Peter did show himself as courageous and trusting in a way that the other disciples do not. He got out of the boat. But, when he saw how strong the wind was, he let fear overpower his faith, and he began to sink into the waves.

Can we relate to this in the hard moments of our lives. It wasn't just that Peter was afraid. It was that, in his fear, he took his eyes off Jesus. He took his eyes off of the one who had made it possible to do by grace what he could never have done by nature.

Left with only his own feeble power against the overwhelming forces of nature, all he could do was cry out: Lord save me! Jesus does not want to humiliate Peter for his failure, but to encourage him to a stronger faith in the future. Jesus is once again in total control of the natural order.

When the storm calms down, all of them are in awe: Truly, you are the Son of God. In Matthew's Gospel, this is the first of three times when someone declares that Jesus is the divine Son. In that moment, they recognized in Jesus what God had always done. God is the one who treads upon the waves of the sea, who stills the storms, who reaches out and saves the faithful from drowning in seas of mortal danger.

God Shows Himself In the Church

A new manifestation or self revelation of God was evident in Kings (in the silence) and in Matthew (power over nature after silence on the mountain). The new manifestation of God in our time will be in us, the Body of Christ, the Church. The fullness of who God is has already been revealed in Jesus, but it remains to be shown in his disciples, by their receptivity, especially to the sacraments and the living of holy lives.

The Church is in a storm, beaten at by the world which refuses to acknowledge the creator and redeemer. Within the Church there is even a turning away from God and a giving in to human sin and weakness.

Paul's anguish for the Church is like Elijah's. Both are depressed because most of the people have turned away from God. Both are asking God to show himself to the people. That is still us today. Paul even says that he would give up his own salvation for those who have turned away if they would only turn back to God.

Throughout history, when faced with tribulation, the faithful have had recourse to God and have found solace and aid. That is why the Church has always played such a great role during times of calamity - during the storms of life. We really need to be able to have mass. It tells us that the Church is visible and present in the storm. Being shut down sounds is good advice for our health but it also shuts down the Church that Christ established to manifest himself in the world.

Call To Action

Our terror of the corona virus is not unlike the disciples in the storm. Times of testing and adversity will always show us where we are on our spiritual path, if we will look at Jesus. Emmanuel, God with us, holds out his hand. Yes, he will chide us. He will say: You of little faith. Why did you doubt? But he will always hold out his hand to lift us up again. Sometimes only in silence will we hear the still small voice of the Lord. You can have confidence that we have a God who is not bound by anything. Find him in the silence, even in the middle of the storm. Cry out to him: Lord, save us. He will not fail. He is worthy of our trust.

Key Passages Today

1 Kings: *When Elijah reached Horeb, the mountain of God, the Lord came to him, saying: Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by. Now there was a great wind, an earthquake and a fire, and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave.*

Psalms: *His salvation is at hand for those who fear him. Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet. Righteousness will make a path for his steps.*

Romans: *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. To them belong the patriarchs and from them comes the Christ.*

Matthew: *He went up the mountain by himself to pray. The boat, battered by the waves, was far from land, for the wind was against them. Early in the morning Jesus came walking toward them on the sea. The disciples were terrified, saying: It is a ghost! But immediately Jesus spoke: Take heart, it is I. Do not be afraid. Peter answered: Lord command me to come to you on the water. Jesus said: Come. So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, and beginning to sink, he cried out: Lord, save me!. Jesus reached out his hand and caught him, saying: You of little faith, why did you doubt? When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshipped him, saying: Truly you are the Son of God.*