



- ♦ **Elijah Encounters God in a Tiny Breeze**
- ♦ **Jesus Comes to Peter and the Apostles in the midst of a Storm**
- ♦ **Paul Laments his People's Rejection of Jesus**

This week's readings offer us much to ponder and reflect on.

First Reading: 1Kings 19:9, 11-13

Elijah encounters God in a tiny breeze

To get a good feel for this reading, it would be helpful to read Chapter 18 and all of Chapter 19 of 1Kings. Reflecting on the first reading, Fr. Flor McCarthy, SDB, writes:

Ahab was king of Israel from 874 to 853 BC. Under his reign, Baal (pagan) worship became the official cult in Israel. The Baal-worship was fostered by Ahab's queen Jezebel (a Phoenician princess). God's prophets were being killed. Those who survived were in hiding. None the less, Elijah took on himself the fearsome task of combating this false worship.

However, he adopted a very militant, even blood-thirsty, approach. For instance, after the defeat of the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel, he had all of them (400 plus) slaughtered. When Jezebel heard what he had done, she wanted him killed, so he fled into the desert in fear for his life. From there he was directed to Mount Horeb, the mountain sanctified by the theophanies of the Exodus and the giving of the law.

At Horeb he took refuge in a cave, where he received a strange vision. He witnessed a whirlwind that shattered rocks, then an earthquake, and then a fire. But the vision led him to understand that God was not in any of these things. Then he heard the sound of a gentle breeze. And he realized at once that he was in the presence of God.

And a voice said to him. *"What are you doing here, Elijah?"*

And he said, *"I'm here because of my zeal for Yahweh. The Israelites have abandoned your covenant. Your prophets have been killed. I am the only one left, and now they want to kill me."*

Then the voice said, *"You must go and anoint Elisha as your successor."*

Thus Elijah was shown another aspect of his God. He was taught that *God's ways* are not man's ways—even Elijah had to learn this. The tactics he had adopted were not God's tactics. Violence is evil. Violence committed in the name of God is doubly evil.

God's approach is not a violent one (symbolised by the mighty wind and the earthquake). Rather, it is a gentle one (symbolised by the breeze). God's approach is as gentle as a breeze. God's presence in the world achieves what he wills as gently and relentlessly as a breeze.

And God's voice is the gentlest voice of all. God did not make himself heard to Elijah in the sound of the mighty wind or the earthquake, but in the whisper of a gentle breeze.

Since we live in a very noisy world, if we want to hear the voice of God, we need to create some stillness and quietness in our soul. (Elijah had to go to a cave to hear it.) Many other voices clamour for our attention, voices that are loud, strident, and seductive.

Yet, for those who know how to listen, God's gentle voice can make itself heard even in the midst of a storm. Over the roar of wind and the waves, the apostles heard the gentle voice of Jesus saying to them, *"Courage! It is I! Do not be afraid."*

To live by faith means to trust in God and to rely on his power. God won't carry us, but he will uphold us if we let go. We are God's children. There is an unbreakable bond between God and us. With this conviction our prayer should produce a kind of lightness in us that makes it possible for us to walk over the waves of danger.

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Gospel: Matthew 14:23-33

Jesus is with us in the stormy events of life

The following reflection on today's Gospel is also by Fr. Flor McCarthy, SDB.

Taken in a literal sense, the story of Peter attempting to walk on water may not be relevant for us. But taken symbolically (which seems to be how Matthew intends it to be taken), it has great relevance for us. 'Walking on water' is a symbol of something that is impossible to unaided human beings. There can be many situations in which we feel weak and powerless.

At some time or other, every disciple of Jesus is faced with very trying circumstances, very difficult decisions, very great sorrows, very powerful temptations. At those times it is as if we are being asked to ‘walk on water.’ Here are some examples of the kind of things the modern Christian might have to cope with.

John is a young person living away from home. It is Sunday morning. He is in a warm bed and it is cold outside. Should he leave that bed and go to Mass? He knows that he will have to face the laughter of his mates as they take their ‘liturgy of the word’ straight out of the tabloids. Will John be able to obey the gentle voice of Christ calling him to walk across the water of cynicism to go to church and listen to the Word of God?

Mary is a single girl who has become pregnant. She is heading into the middle of a storm of protest from her parents and gossip from her neighbors as soon as the news breaks. Then she is offered a way out—a quiet abortion. No one will ever know. But then she hears the gentle voice of Christ saying that abortion is wrong. Will she have the courage to listen to that voice?

Eileen is a young mother with three children. Suddenly her husband leaves her for another woman. She feels hurt and betrayed, lonely and angry. Then she hears the voice of Christ inviting her to trust. Will she have the courage to walk on those troubled waters, relying only on the word of Christ?

Gerry is a policeman. A drug dealer offers him a large amount of money if he would turn a blind eye to his activities. It’s very tempting. But then he hears the voice of Christ saying, ‘Do not participate in corruption.’ Will he be able to walk across those foul and ugly waters?

Paul is a commercial traveler. He is away from home. One night he meets a very attractive woman. He hasn’t been getting on very well of late with his wife. No one will every know if he is unfaithful to her. Will he have the strength to walk across the waters of fidelity at the call of Christ, who tells him that adultery is wrong?

We could multiply the examples, but I think the point has been made. At some time or other, everyone is faced with very trying circumstances. At those times it is as if the Lord is asking us to ‘walk on water.’ But at the same time he stretches out his hand to uphold us.

It’s in our weak moments that we experience the strength of God. If we never felt ourselves going under, then we’d never know the rescuing power of God.

At those times we can draw courage from the example of Peter. Peter represents the typical disciple who is caught between faith and doubt. He set out to obey Jesus, but ‘as soon as he felt the force of the wind,’ that is, persecution, his faith failed him. Jesus’ rebuke, “Man of little faith! Why did you doubt?” is directed at us too.

Like Peter, we often start out courageously only to lose heart when the going gets tough.

We have to contend not only with an outer struggle (against ‘the elements’), but also with an inner struggle (against ourselves). To

some extent, the whole life of a Christian is a kind of ‘walking on water,’ in so far as it implies walking in faith, which means relying only on the word of Christ. Many times we are asked to step out on his word. But Christ is not a ghostlike figure from the past. He is the Son of God who lives among us.

One day we will have to leave the earthly ‘boat’ that has carried us through the stormy waters of this world, and set out across the dark waters of death. If at difficult moments during life we have opted for Christ, then at death it will come naturally to us to reach out and take his hand, so that he may haul us onto the shores of eternity.

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Another reflection on the Gospel by Patricia Sanchez

Fifty years and four months ago, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, minister, pastor, professor, and one who resisted the Third Reich until his death, heard the same invitation that Jesus extended to Peter in today’s Gospel, “Come!” Heartened by Jesus’ words, “Do not be afraid,” Bonhoeffer in full faith, followed Jesus through death to life. His analysis of Peter’s response is worthy of our attention: “Peter had to leave the ship and risk his life on the sea, in order to learn both his own weakness and the almighty power of his Lord. If Peter had not taken the risk, he would never have learned the meaning of faith. ... The road to faith passes through obedience to the call of Jesus. Unless a definite step is demanded, the call vanishes into thin air, and if people imagine that they can follow Jesus without taking this step, they are deluding themselves like fanatics.”

Bonhoeffer went on to point out the theological paradox evidenced in the interchange between Jesus, who commanded the elements, and Peter, who was asking to believe and follow Jesus into the murky, unknown depths. Only the one who believes is obedient, noted Bonhoeffer, and only the one who is obedient believes. "Faith is only real where there is obedience, never without it, and faith only becomes faith in the act of obedience" (*The Cost of Discipleship*, Macmillan Co., New York, 1960). In effect, Jesus was inviting Peter to learn a new language, that of obedient faith, and in learning that language he would be able to make the vision of Jesus his own.

If Peter had not taken the risk, he would never have learned the meaning of faith. ... The road to faith passes through obedience to the call of Jesus.

Through the experience of Peter, the Matthean Jesus reaches beyond the Sea of Galilee and beyond Judah into our own lives and experiences, calling forth in us a similar faith. "Come!" He speaks the language of daring but also of reassurance: "It is I. Do not be afraid." Jesus is there for us as he was for Peter, ready to stretch out his hand to catch us.

But more than a safe port in a tempestuous sea, the presence of Jesus in this narrative reminds readers of who he is. Some scholars, such as Douglas A. Hare (*Matthew*, John Know Press, Louisville, Ky: 1993), points to the "high Christology" here. [A "high Christology" stresses the divine nature of Jesus; a "low Christology" places emphasis on the humanity of Christ—Fr. Eamon.] A number of texts reference God walking on the sea (Job 9:8; Hab 3:125; Psalm 77:19), so some argue that today's Gospel is a theophany in which the divinity of Jesus is revealed. This idea is supported by Jesus' statement in verse 27: "Get hold of yourselves! It is I" or *ego eimi*, as per Exod 3:14, "I am who I am."

This Gospel also emphasizes Jesus' *function*. He is the Messiah, charged and sent by God to save humankind. The story told earlier in the gospel regarding the quieting of the storm (Matt 8:23-27) reminds the Matthean church of the 80s and the church today that regardless of how the bark of Peter is jostled by the storms of scandal, temptations, doubts, persecution, lukewarm leaders or unfaithful servants, Jesus will be present as one who calms storms, quiets fears and challenges the courage and commitment of his own.

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Second Reading: Romans 9:1-5

Paul's Great Sorrow

The following reflection is from my commentary on this reading for our Small Christian Communities.

These verses are an introduction to Chapters 9, 10 and 11 of Romans, in which Paul deals with the issue of the Jews in God's mystery of salvation. Paul is very proud of his Jewish heritage and, prior to his conversion, saw it as his God-given duty to rid the Israelite faith of Christian heretics. But God opens his eyes and helps him to see that Judaism is a preparation for the fullness of God's revelation. Paul hopes all Jews would come to this conclusion and open their hearts to Jesus. Unfortunately, this is not happening. The rejection of Christ by his own people breaks Paul's heart. His grief is so deep that he is willing to be separated from Christ if this means that his people will accept Christ. Paul lists seven privileges or blessings that his people have received from God which should open their hearts to see in Christ the fullness of God's revelation. Paul's pain is not unlike the pain of people who become separated from family and friends over issues of faith and religion.

Please share the following with others.

Have patience with everything that remains unsolved in your heart.

Try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books written in a foreign language.

Do not now look for the answers. They cannot now be given to you because you could not live them.

It is a question of experiencing everything.

At present you need to live the question.

Perhaps you will gradually, without even noticing it, find yourself experiencing the answer, some distant day.

By Rainer Maria Rilke

Have a blessed week,

Fr Eamon

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