

19th Sunday in Ordinary Time - A

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

1st Reading - 1 Kings 19:9a, 11-13a

The nineteenth chapter of 1st Kings is the Elijah story which has close parallels with the story of Moses on the same mountain (Sinai/Horeb). Both journey to the mountain to meet God; Moses while fleeing from the Egyptians, and Elijah while fleeing from Jezebel. Both even receive miraculous rations in route (manna and bread). In today's reading we hear of Elijah's encounter with God.

[At the mountain of God, Horeb, Elijah] ^{9a} came to a cave, where he took shelter. ¹¹ Then the LORD said, "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. ¹² After the earthquake there was fire--but the LORD was not in the fire. After the fire there was a tiny whispering sound. ^{13a} When he heard this, Elijah hid his face in his cloak and went and stood at the entrance of the cave.

That the Lord is not in the mighty wind, the earthquake, or the fire, but rather in the gentle whisper is a lesson for the prophet. God, in His own way without great fanfare will work His will for Israel. Notice that Elijah does not come out until the calamities have passed. Hiding his face in his cloak may be a method of self-preservation: who can look upon God's face and live (Exodus 33:20).

2nd Reading - Romans 9:1-5

Having heard Saint Paul describe the future glory that awaits those who live the Christian life empowered by the Spirit and that we are more than conquerors; with the gift of faith, nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus, Saint Paul now laments for the Jews who have failed to recognize the messiah; those with whom Paul had worshiped before his conversion.

¹ I speak the truth in Christ,

Saint Paul is swearing an oath. He has no resentment against Jews who may have caused him trouble or charged him with disloyalty.

I do not lie; my conscience joins with the holy Spirit in bearing me witness ² that I have great sorrow and constant anguish in my heart.

He is saddened at the condition of his fellow kinsmen.

“Since it appears that earlier he was speaking against the Jews, who thought that they were justified by the law, Paul now shows his desire and love for them and says that his conscience bears witness

in Christ Jesus and in the Holy Spirit.” [The Ambrosiaster (ca. A.D. 366-384), *Commentaries on Thirteen Pauline Epistles Romans 9,2*]

³ For I could wish that I myself were accursed and separated from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kin according to the flesh.

Paul would bear the curse himself, be cut off from Christ, for the sake of his fellow Jews. This is an echo of Moses’ prayer for the unruly Israelites (Exodus 32:32), that they may be forgiven.

“Why be surprised that the apostle desires to be cursed for his brethren’s sake, when he who is in the form of God emptied Himself and took on the form of a servant and was made a curse for us (see Philippians 2:6-8)? Why be surprised if, when Christ became a curse for His servants, one of His servants should become a curse for his brethren?” [Origen (post A.D. 244), *Commentaries on Romans*]

⁴ They are Israelites; theirs the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; ⁵ theirs the patriarchs,

Instead of the common political title “Jews,” Paul makes use of their honorific religious title, “Israelites,” bestowed by Yahweh Himself on His people (Genesis 32:28). He then proceeds to recount the seven historic prerogatives associated with this name:

1. “Adoption” – Sonship: Israel is the adopted son of God (Exodus 4:22).
2. “Glory” – The resplendent manifestation of Yahweh’s presence to Israel in the desert and in the Jerusalem Temple (Exodus 16:10; 40:34; 1 Kings 8:10-11).
3. “Covenants” – The covenants made with the patriarchs (Genesis 15:18; Exodus 24:7-8; Sirach 44:12, 18).
4. “Giving of the Law” – The Torah, the expression of God’s will given to Moses (Exodus 20:1-17; Deuteronomy 5:1-22).
5. “Worship” – Cult: The awesome worship of Yahweh in the Temple; so different from the idolatrous worship of Israel’s neighbors, which often included prostitution and human sacrifice.
6. “Promises” – The promises made to Abraham (Genesis 12:12; 21:12), Moses (Deuteronomy 18:18-19, David (2 Samuel 7:11-16).
7. “Patriarchs” – Israel’s ancestral heritage. It still worships the God of its fathers; Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (see Romans 11:28).

and from them, according to the flesh, is the Messiah.

To this summary of Israel’s seven historic privileges, Saint Paul adds an eighth, the climax: “Messiah” – The descendent par excellence. The messiah is their greatest title to glory, but unfortunately is not recognized as such.

God who is over all be blessed forever.

The best rendering of this verse is “who is above all things, God, blessed forever” which was interpreted for the first eight centuries to mean Christ is physically descended, who is above all

things, God, blessed forever.

Amen.

Gospel - Matthew 14:22-23

Last week we heard the feeding of the five thousand. This week's reading begins where we left off last week as we hear of Jesus' walking on water. Even though the apostles saw Jesus walking on the water, Peter wanted further proof "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." To which Jesus gives a simple reply: "Come". How strong is our faith? Do we ask Jesus to prove His presence by His actions: "Jesus, cure me of my illness . . . let me win the lottery . . . protect my children in school . . . stop the violence in our communities . . ." What happens if our favors aren't granted? Do we waiver in our faith as Peter did? Or do we keep on going and ask again, and again, and again? Our faith in Jesus is a gift to be cherished and practiced. If we practice our faith every day, we don't risk drowning in doubt as Peter almost did.

²² Then he made the disciples get into the boat and precede him to the other side,

Crossing to the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee (Lake Genesareth) would have them entering Gentile territory.

while he dismissed the crowds. ²³ After doing so, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray.

Jesus' solitary nocturnal prayer is a model for all Christians – besides prayer in common, we also need time for personal prayer.

When it was evening he was there alone. ²⁴ Meanwhile the boat, already a few miles offshore,

The previous New American translation was "several hundred yards offshore". Mark says the boat was in the middle of the sea. Matthew actually says "many stadia" and a stadia is about 200 yards.

was being tossed about by the waves, for the wind was against it.

In this scene the headwinds could represent the hostile forces of the world which will buck them every step of the way.

²⁵ During the fourth watch of the night, he came toward them, walking on the sea.

In Canaanite myth and in the Old Testament, the Lord overcomes the waves of death (Psalm 79:19; Job 9:8; 38:16; Isaiah 43:16; Sirach 24:5-6).

²⁶ When the disciples saw him walking on the sea they were terrified. "It is a ghost," they said, and they cried out in fear.

In Mark, the wind stops and the disciples are astonished. In Matthew's account the disciples are still

without understanding.

²⁷ At once (Jesus) spoke to them, "Take courage, it is I;

Literally, "I Am". Jesus shares in the divine power.

do not be afraid." ²⁸ Peter said to him in reply, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." ²⁹ He said, "Come." Peter got out of the boat and began to walk on the water toward Jesus.

Peter, as leader of the apostles, sets the example.

³⁰ But when he saw how (strong) the wind was he became frightened; and, beginning to sink, he cried out, "Lord, save me!"

Peter has responsibilities not shared by the others. If he is to meet these responsibilities he must have faith.

³¹ Immediately Jesus stretched out his hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" ³² After they got into the boat, the wind died down. ³³ Those who were in the boat did him homage, saying, "Truly, you are the Son of God."

This ending is quite different from Mark's. Mark doesn't have Peter walking on water. Instead, when Jesus climbs into the boat the Apostles are amazed – because their hearts are hardened and they don't understand the significance or Jesus' divinity.