

# Homily for the 19th Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 8-9, 2020

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

Preacher: Sr. Barbara Moore

Most people we know may struggle with faith but hold on to the struggle and the beliefs they have. I think the experience of Peter in today's Gospel is full of meaning and lessons for all of us. The Covid-19 virus, like Peter's experience, has a "sinking feeling" about it, doesn't it?

Often, we are alone like Peter after he ventures out of the boat. Peter according to Mathew appears to be full of confidence in both Jesus and himself. "Lord if it is you, command me to come to you on the water. He said, 'Come.' Peter got out of the boat and began to walk on the water to Jesus." Peter's confidence was overwhelmed by terror as he began to sink, and he saw heartache and tragedy before him. In many parts of our nation we see the same scenario playing out.

"Take courage. It is I; do not be afraid." But Peter wanted proof. He did not remain in the boat to help his partners. He was so confident that he left his terrified friends in the boat and soon felt the same terror they were experiencing.

Some in leadership these days minimize the virus and spread false information about it. Full of confidence, people venture out without protective gear and find themselves "sinking" into a massive spread of the virus.

But Jesus is present in the midst of terror today in the Gospel, and asks nothing of the disciples except not to be afraid. But for many of us, fear is a daily companion. Fear of the virus; fear of schools staying closed as well as fear of their reopening. There is fear about personal safety, of dying and the loss of jobs and loved ones. We long to hear Jesus' words, "Take courage. It is I; do not be afraid." And we long to believe it.

But it is the Prophet Elijah who has a powerful message for us especially during these hard times. The text tells us he was "sheltering" in a cave. That sheltering is easily understood by all of us. Some of us are alone, others grappling with families close together, trying to work and teach at the same time and in the same place.

Then God shares with Elijah that the Divine One would be passing by the cave. Imagine Elijah's anticipation! A series of natural disasters happened and most would expect God's presence in them because that had happened in other parts of the Old Testament. Wind, fire, earthquakes and crushing rocks must have startled Elijah like the storm on the sea that terrified the Disciples. But we are told that God was not in them. It was in the "tiny whisper" that Elijah heard the voice of God. That presence seems to contain an answer for us: Be quiet and listen to the message and find the presence of the Holy Spirit. Be open to the Spirit in unexpected ways. Imagine hearing God in a tiny small whisper.

During these days of political campaigning, we often hear some in leadership try to minimize the virus and spread false information. We can find ourselves "sinking" into a massive spread of the virus, in virus debates and international conflicts. It is hard at times to hear God's voice in the midst of vicious lies and unkindness.

God was passing by Elijah, the isolated one. Jesus was passing by the terrified ones in the boat battered by a storm. Might that unexpected presence be calling us during this difficult time to find God's presence in the unexpected? To find and to hear God in the kind words and actions of another? Are we being asked to be patient and wait for that Word? Or to avoid the storms, the earthquakes and the rocks of conversations that are filled with meanness, lies and arrogance?

Paul today speaks to the Romans of his own "anguish" that many of his beloved Israelites, his own people, could not accept Christ. From Elijah, to Peter and through Paul, all of us, then and now, have fears. We are invited to find the Christ in often hidden and unexpected ways saying, "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid".