

19th Sunday in Ordinary Time A/2008

God had blessed Israel in many and various ways. They had been chosen from all the nations of the earth to be a particular people of God. When they were in slavery in Egypt, God set them free and led them to the Promised Land. In order to keep them in the spirit of the Covenant, God sent them the prophets to instruct them and show them the right way in which to walk. Finally, when the time was accomplished, God sent them a Messiah in order to fulfill the promise made to their forefathers.

To them, St Paul says, were given all the privileges someone would wish in this world: the adoption, the glory, the Covenants, the Law, the worship, the promises, the patriarchs and the Messiah. However, in spite of all these blessings, Israel had been often ungrateful to God and unfaithful to his Covenant. Instead of worshipping the true God who saved them, people turned to idols and forgot the Covenant. Worse: when the promise of the Messiah was fulfilled in Jesus, they rejected Christ and preferred to live in their own way, without God.

It is this situation that breaks the heart of St Paul. In fact, St Paul would even prefer to be accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of his own people. And yet, he remains with Christ, because he knows well that nothing can separate him from the love of God shown to us in Jesus Christ.

The painful situation of St Paul is what we sometimes experience today. How many times the members of our own families have been stubborn in their refusal of Jesus, his word and the teaching of the Church? Shall we cut any tie with them because of that? That would not be the right attitude to take. If we cannot change them, at least we have to pray for them.

But, how does it come that people are reluctant to accept God? How do we explain the situation of infidelity St Paul deplores? Infidelity is rooted in the stubbornness of the heart of Israel, and anyone, when people try to pass over God's Covenant and look for him where he is not. That is what happened when Ahab was king of Israel and married a foreign queen, Jezebel. This latter led the people to worship idols and build altars to foreign gods.

At that time, the prophet Elijah stood up and denounced the sin of the people, and the hypocrisy of the royal family. Unhappy, the queen threatened the prophet's life and wanted to kill him. In order to protect his life, Elijah fled in the desert to find refuge at the cave of the mountain of the Lord where he was to meet God.

Because in the past God appeared to Moses in spectacular events, the prophet thought that God was in the mighty wind, but God was not there. When the earthquake happened, the prophet thought that it was the moment, but God was not there. Even when the blazing fire came, God was not there. Rather, it was in the tiny whispering sound of the breeze that God was present. Once Elijah realized the truth, he just covered his face as a sign of reverence and adoration.

What does this text teach us? What we learn is that God does not live in the spectacular events of nature, but in the silence of his word. That is why this text is often used to highlight the importance of contemplation and silence as the appropriate attitudes that allow us the encountering with God in prayer.

Of course, prayer can have many aspects and recover various forms. But, they all mean that we put ourselves in the presence of the Lord. As such, prayer requires a certain amount of stillness, quiet and peace. In silence and reverence, we lift up our hearts to the Lord in prayer. If so, each Christian must find a room in his/her heart for silence. We might be involved in many hectic activities like parenting, childrearing, or working at our jobs, but no matter what we do, there should be certain stillness at the center of our lives. When at the end of a hectic day, we can come to the Lord in silence and prayer, we refuel ourselves and are invigorated to face a new day with strength.

Jesus himself gives us an example of prayer and silence in the presence of his Father. Before and after any activity, he always withdrew in silence to pray to the Father. Prayer is a conversation we engage with God and in which we present to him our joys and sorrows, our needs and expectations, in the firm conviction that he will come to our aid, because he loves us.

The assurance that God loves us should bring us to trust him and put into his hands all the burdens of our life. That is the sense of Jesus' reproach to Peter: "O you of little faith, why did you doubt"? No doubt that the disciples had difficulties in the boat, and Peter was frightened of sinking. The problem, however, is that in all this situation, Jesus had never left them. That is why suddenly he appeared to them and comforted them: "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid".

The tossing of the boat is the symbol of all the difficulties the disciples, the Church and we are confronted with in life. What all this means is that in the hour of the disciples needs, Jesus came to them. When the wind was contrary and life was a struggle, Jesus was there to help. No sooner had a need arisen than Jesus was there to help and to save.

The same is true for us today. In life, the wind is often contrary. There are times when we are up against it and life is a desperate struggle with ourselves, with our circumstances, with our temptations, with our sorrows and with our decisions. At such time, there is no need to struggle alone, for Jesus comes to us across the storms of life, with hand stretched out to save, and with his calm, clear voice bidding us take heart and have no fear.

Jesus is a comforting presence. Where Jesus is, there is peace and serenity. When we are in danger of being overwhelmed by the storms of life, Jesus is there. His presence is reassuring. We should always have Jesus at our side, because he knows when to intervene and rescue us. When we are overwhelmed by countless problems, let us call upon Jesus. May God bless you all!

1 Kings 19, 9a., 11-12, 13-14; Romans 9, 1-5; Matthew 14,22-33



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