

Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time A/2011

The readings of this Sunday talk about the revelation of God and its meaning for us. The first reading relates the flight of the prophet Elijah to mount Horeb at the encounter of God. The context of the flight was a conflict between the prophet and Jezebel, Queen and wife of King Ahab. In fact, Jezebel had introduced foreign gods in Israel and ordered the people to adore them. Infuriated by such idolatry, Elijah made the prophets of Baal, the god of Jezebel, killed by the sword.

Unhappy with the situation, the queen vowed to kill Elijah who fled to the mountain of the Lord in order to save his life and find solace with God. Because in the past God revealed himself in extraordinary events, the prophet thought that he would appear to him in the mighty wind, but God was not there. Then, the earthquake came, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the quake, there was a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. Finally, when a tiny whispering sound came, it was there that God was present. Realizing the truth, Elijah covered his face as a sign of reverence and adoration.

What is behind this text is the recognition of the truth that life is not always comfortable and easy. It is made up of the ups and the downs, success and failure. Sometimes, in order to succeed, we need to protect ourselves so that the ideal for which we are fighting for may not die with us. Another idea prominent to the text is the invitation that when evil besets us, we should have recourse to God, but not a God we will find in the spectacular events, but rather in the daily events of life and in silent prayer.

All that helps us understand what today's Gospel wants to tell us as Jesus comes to the rescue of the frightened disciples on the sea. First of all, the Gospel says that after having dismissed the crowd and put the disciples into a boat, Jesus went up the mountain by himself to pray.

Jesus' example of prayer is a strong invitation that we, too, maintain a permanent contact with God in each moment of our life. Therefore, no matter what we do and how hectic might be the activities in which we are involved, we have always to create a time and a space of offering to God what we do. By doing so, we put ourselves into God's hands so that he blesses us and invigorates us to face the new day and our activities with strength.

After having spent the whole night in prayer, Jesus came toward the disciples in a very critical moment when their boat was tossed by a strong wind and the waves. Because of what was happening to them, the disciples were so afraid that they took Jesus for a ghost. But, the Lord reassured them of his presence and invited them to courage.

This episode wants to teach us that at the very difficult moments of the life of the disciples, Jesus was always there to help and rescue them. This episode symbolizes also our own struggles and crises of life. When things do not work as well as we would wish, when we feel so lonely because of disappointment, sorrows or frustrations, we are not alone. Jesus is there present, stretching out his hand to rescue us. But what we need is to open the eyes of our hearts in order to recognize him and trust that even in those dark moments, he is present and comes to us.

If that is the case, we certainly understand why Jesus reproaches Peter for having doubted while he was walking on the waters at his injunction. This reproach means that

the most difficult is not the events we are going through or the problems we are confronted with, but rather our trust in Jesus that even in this difficult time, he can do something for us. In that perspective, faith means more than believing that God exists or he has created the world. It means, rather, trust in him beyond any proof. That is why Jesus calls Peter as someone having little faith.

What it means literally is that, even if Peter was surrounded by waves and the boat in which he was with his friends were about to sink, nothing bad would happen to them because they had someone greater than the forces and the phenomena of nature.

In fact, where Jesus is present, there is peace and serenity. He is comforting and lifting in times of troubles. The problem, however, is that when we are overwhelmed by the storms of life, we are often blinded by our pain and suffering. And yet, Jesus is there, stretching out his hand in order to save us. He lives all the pains of our life with us.

What is more is that we have been educated in such a way that we have to count on ourselves and fight ourselves in order to find a solution when we have problems. That can work for some problems, but not for all. It would be an illusion to think that we can resolve all the problems of our life alone. There are things we can do ourselves, for some others, we certainly need God's help. There is no shame in recognizing our incapacity or inability to resolve all the problems we have. That is why it is important to have the courage to call upon Jesus in time of problems so that he saves us.

It is in that way we have to appreciate the importance of Jesus for the life of world and even for the life of Israel, the people of those who gave him birth. As St Paul says, God has bestowed many blessings upon the people of Israel. He gave them 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 ungrateful and unfaithful. Instead of worshiping the true God, people turned to idols and forgot the Covenant. As though all that was not enough, when the promise of the Messiah was fulfilled in Jesus, they rejected Christ and preferred to live on their own.

It is this situation that breaks the heart of St Paul, who would prefer being accused and cut off from Christ for the sake of his own people. This painful situation of St Paul is what we sometimes experience today when our own members of family and relatives reject God and prefer to lead their lives without him. Today, we are reminded that we have to pray for them and to love them. It serves no purpose in cutting ties with them. The best service we can render them is to keep them in our prayers before God the Father knowing that one day, their hearts can be open to the reality of God's kingdom. God bless you all!

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



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