

Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time A/2020

Today I want to talk to you about the challenge of finding God in the ordinary circumstances of life. In order to develop this topic, I will focus especially on the first reading.

In fact, the prophet Elijah who was fleeing the city of Jerusalem in order to protect his life finds refuge in a cave close to the Mount Horeb. Why was he fleeing? Because the Queen Jezebel, the pagan wife of King Ahab, wanted to kill him for having made the false prophets of Baal massacred.

Tired with the journey of 40 days in the desert, Elijah found a shelter in the cave. At that precise moment, he heard the voice of God asking him to get out and stand at the entrance of the cave so that he might speak to him. As Elijah was waiting for God, a strong and heavy wind came, but God was not there. Then, came an earthquake, but God was not there. After that, came a fire, but God was not there. Finally, came a tiny whispering sound and God was there. Recognizing God in the whispering sound, Elijah knelt down in adoration.

Strong and heavy wind, earthquake and fire reminds us of the encounter between God and Moses as he talked to him at the Mount Sinai and the burning bush (Exodus 3: 1-17; 19: 16-19; Deut. 4: 10-15).

So, Elijah was expecting God to come to him in the same way as he did in the past with Moses. But, God chose another way, that of simplicity, gentleness and humility. While he was expecting God to come to him in extraordinary manifestations, God chose an ordinary manifestation, the whispering sound.

Why I am interested in this text? Because, it contains an important message that can teach us the way God reveals himself to us and to the world. In fact, many people believe that it is in the extraordinary events and the mind blowing happenings that God is present and it is there that they can meet him. And yet, today's first reading teaches us exactly the opposite:

First, God does not come to our encounter in very spectacular ways. Of course, we cannot set limits on God or impose upon him a particular way he has to reveal himself to us. But, in this particular case, as it is in the incarnation of Jesus, God comes to us in gentleness, simplicity and in the ordinary circumstances of life

Only those who open up to the interior dimension of life can discover the presence of God at the heart of their ordinary life. For having failed to open up to the dimension of the interior life, the Israelites did not recognize the Messiah when he came, although he was present in their midst (John 1: 26).

In other words, the ordinary circumstances of life speak of God because he is hidden in them. Without the eyes of the heart, which are the eyes of faith, it would be difficult to discover him. As St Paul says, "May the eyes of your hearts be enlightened so that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power" (Ephesians 1: 18-19).

Second, life is made up of very simple gestures like receiving friends, having something to eat, going to bed at night, getting some rest, getting up in the morning, going to work, giving ourselves to some activities, etc. Those activities are so very ordinary that we go day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, without the stream of our life changing at all.

It is in those very simple things that we have the opportunity to meet God, to open up to him, to praise him for the gift of life with its daily trends of ups and downs and to show our appreciation to him for what he is doing for us in bestowing his blessings upon us.

However, if our eyes are blind, we can pass beside him while he extends his hands to us, waving to us. If our ears are deaf, we cannot hear him crying out to us, calling after us. If we fulfill our activities to the best of our abilities for the glory of God and the wellbeing of our fellows, they become a space of encounter with God.

Third, when we pay attention to the daily happenings of our lives, we realize that everything refers to God as a source that gives life and consistence to our activities. In the end, through those simple human activities we can rise up to God as their source and origin.

In this way what appears as ordinary and banal becomes a pointer to God. But, if we expect only extraordinary things to happen to us, if all our yearning is that we meet only the things that can astonish us, for which we can say “wow, wow”, we run the risk of never encountering God through what we do, in the very ordinary circumstances of life.

In truth, any activity in which we are involved is a given opportunity to rise up to God, because he has already preceded us in it. He has sanctified it with his pervading presence.

The attention to the ordinariness of life as a space of encounter with God requires the opening of the eyes of the hearts, because as the French writer Antoine de St Exupery says in “The Little Prince”: “What is essential is invisible to the eyes. One sees well only with the heart”.

God comes to us in the ordinary circumstances of life. He comes to us through the daily gestures of work, in the dialogue with our fellows, in the encounter with strangers, in the sharing with the needy, the poor, etc. Anytime that, animated and inspired by his Spirit, we want to prolong his gestures of love, compassion, forgiveness and generosity, Jesus comes to our encounter. When we cannot acknowledge the signs of his presence in the midst of our ordinary life, then, it is possible for us to pass beside him while he is extending to us his hand.

Let us pray that our Lord touches our hearts so that we recognize him in our daily activities and in the encounter with companions, friends, strangers and the needy. God bless you all!

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



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