

19th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME; Cycle - A; Aug. 13th 2023
1Kgs 19: 9a, 11-13a; Rom. 9: 1-5; Mt. 14:22-33

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Today's first reading and the gospel are the clear illustrations of God's concern for his faithful who are in trouble. Definitely He will intervene to save His dear ones unexpectedly. But at the same time both the incidents show that God will never appear to us the way we expect.

Prophet Elijah was the most powerful one among the Old Testament Prophets. He even managed to put to death 450 pagan prophets of god Baal who resided in the palace of King Ahab. But this act infuriated the pagan wife of Ahab, Jezebel. So she sought to kill Elijah and thus he fled to the Mount of Horeb where he hid himself in a cave, losing all hope to live. Elijah did not even call out to God for help. But God spoke to him and promised him of His visit. Naturally, Elijah expected a mighty appearance of God. But to his surprise, God passed by in a tiny whispering wind, which was enough to save Elijah.

To the amazement of all, Jesus fed the five thousand men which brought a big excitement among the people and the disciples. Jesus knew that things were going out of hand and thus he dispatched the twelve disciples to the other side of the lake while he managed to dismiss the crowd. Jesus too was disturbed by this commotion and thus he wanted to be alone and went to the mountain to pray. But in the wee hours of the night the disciples were caught up in a big storm and the situation was getting out of their control. They felt the absence of Jesus; but never expected his intervention as he was all alone on the mountain. But Jesus didn't miss the critical situation of his disciples and to their surprise he walked on the water towards them. Unfortunately in their stressful situation they didn't recognize Jesus at all. We also notice couple other critical occasions the disciples failing to recognize Jesus and his power. In today's incident Peter totally failed to see the power of Jesus as he ventured to walk on the water.

This event shows three things. First of all, Jesus has the authority over the natural powers. He can control any force on earth and he can calm the storm not only in the nature but also in the Church and in the individual's life. Secondly it shows the nature of the Church on earth. *The boat in the rough sea is one of the earliest Christian symbols of the Church's journey in the world.* Perhaps, you have seen such paintings. Down through the centuries the Church never sailed in the calm ocean. She faced and faces the storm of crisis and scandals. In the first three centuries the Church was persecuted. Finally in the 4th century she gained the religious freedom and then the internal crisis and corruptions interrupted her peaceful life. The consequence of all these was the division of the Church.

Even today the Church faces many challenges. **Thirdly this event shows that there is no crisis in the Church and in the individuals which Jesus cannot solve.** God can use any means to fix things. That is what the angel Gabriel said to Mary, **“For nothing will be impossible or God.”** St. Paul asks in the letter to the Romans chapter 8: **“If God is for us, who can be against us?”**

It is true that when we face some crisis and failures in our lives we too expect an extraordinary intervention of God as Elijah expected. In that situation even when Jesus appears to us in the most ordinary way, we may not recognize him as the disciples failed to recognize him in their critical moment. Peter’s desire to walk on the water and his failure in trust is quite human. When Peter saw the strong rising wind he doubted whether the power of Jesus was sufficient to keep him steady. Sometimes we too feel the same when we are in a very critical situation whether the power of Jesus is sufficient for us or not. When we too sink, instead of crying out to Jesus for help we go in seeking help from the material world. Jesus scolded Peter for the lack of his faith.

Though we fail to turn to Jesus for help or we fail to see him, he will never fail to intervene for us. He can step into our shaking boat any moment. We have to believe that God’s power is more than sufficient to save our boat from sinking. Sometimes, the voice of Jesus may be like a whispering breeze which can come to us through an unexpected person or friend, at an unexpected time and situation. We have heard in the gospel as what change took place in the boat once Jesus entered it. Matthew says, **“After they (means Jesus with Peter) got into the boat, the wind died down.”** **This is an important point to keep in mind.** Yes, in order to calm down the storm in our life we should allow Jesus to enter into our boat. **Once Jesus steps into our life and our families, even though we are sinking, the wind will die down and we will be safe.** What causes all sorts of chaos in the world today? Family life is collapsing, children are disoriented and more and more young people are depressed. These problems are the clear sign of the absence of Jesus. The modern culture tries to drive out Jesus from everywhere; it does not want to see the trace of Jesus anywhere. Finally, the very culture will meet with a tragic end. The great preacher Rick Warren writes, **“Without God, life has no purpose, and without purpose, life has no meaning. Without meaning, life has no significance or hope.”**