

9 August 2026 – 19th Sunday in Ordinary Time ‘A’

1 Kings 19:9a, 11-13a; Rom. 9:1-5; Matt. 14:22-33

HOMILY

All the readings at today's Mass speak to us of encounters with God. Yet these are truly disconcerting and unexpected encounters. Elijah was a fiery prophet, denouncing God's enemies and ready to move heaven and earth to do so. And yet, when he found himself on God's mountain, Horeb, the Lord did not reveal his presence to him in the violent storm that split the mountains and shattered the rocks, nor in the earthquake and the fire, but rather in a gentle breeze.

When Paul, in the second reading, expresses how torn he is between his love for his people, the Jewish people, and his mission as an apostle of Christ, he is no doubt thinking of that unexpected and dramatic encounter on the road to Damascus, which transformed his life.

And finally, it is by walking miraculously on the water that Jesus reveals himself as God to his frightened disciples.

Let us pause for a moment to consider this final encounter and try to see what message the Evangelist Matthew wishes to convey to us. Let us first note that Matthew, throughout his Gospel, mentions Jesus' solitary prayer only twice: on this occasion and in the Garden of Gethsemane – that is, at particularly tragic moments. After learning of John the Baptist's death, Jesus sets off by boat with his disciples to a quiet and secluded spot. The crowds notice this and go ahead of him. He takes pity on these poor people and feeds them after healing their sick. He then compels (a strong word) his disciples to go to the other side. The other shore is no longer in Israel; it is the world of the Gentiles, to whom they must also go. He undoubtedly also wishes to protect them from the danger of being swept along by the crowd in a movement that would seek to transform Jesus into a political Messiah. He dismisses the crowd on his own and goes alone up into the mountains to pray to his Father. As a result of this encounter with God, his humanity acquires one of the characteristics that the Old Testament recognized as the prerogative of God: that of walking on water (cf. Job 9:8; 38:16).

The world we live in often seems like a boat buffeted by the wind on a stormy sea. Take, for example, the Covid-19 pandemic, which affected virtually every country on the planet a few years ago. If Jesus were to appear, walking calmly across that stormy sea, we would

no doubt think, like the Apostles, that he was a ghost. And yet he comes to us constantly, not in grand, noisy displays, but in the gentle breeze. If we have the courage - or the audacity - to issue him the same challenge that Peter did: 'If it is really you, command me to come to you', he will surely say to us: 'Come!' ' Peter's 'if' - that ability to acknowledge and own up to his doubt - is just as courageous as his 'command' - his willingness to obey at any cost. May we, then, likewise have the courage to walk across that stormy sea without fear and to go out to meet Jesus even before He reappears in the boat. All those in the boat recognised Jesus when the wind had died down. Just as Elijah had recognised God in the gentle breeze. The challenge that God may be setting for men and women today, just as He did for Peter, is to meet Him at the very heart of the storm.

Let us not wait until all conflicts have subsided on the international stage or even within the Church before hoping for the grace of an intimate encounter with Jesus. These times are made for those with a character that is both strong and bold, like that of Peter. In a world where God reveals Himself in such disconcerting ways, let us have the audacity to say to Him: 'If it is really you, command me to come to you by walking across this chaos that is ours.' He will no doubt say to us: 'Come.' Let us pray that we may then have the courage to press on, our eyes fixed on Jesus and not on the storm that surrounds us. But even if the storm brings our fears back, it does not matter. Jesus will take us by the hand and lead us into the boat... without forgetting that this boat is heading for the other shore, towards the world of the 'nations', towards the universal mission.

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