

NINETEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Cycle A

1 Kings 19:9a,11-13a

Romans 9:1-5

Matthew 14:22-33

(An unlit candle, a bible open to this week's gospel and a small boat rest on a table in the gathering place.)

OPENING PAYER

(The candle is lit. The leader calls members to a time of silent attention to the presence of God among them. After some minutes, the community joins in singing, "Peace is Flowing Like a River," available on the Internet. When the song is complete, a member prays as follows.)

A Psalm of Longing

Member: My spirit hungers for your love,
 O Divine Maker of Hearts,
 for the taste of your joy and the
 aroma of your peace.
 How I long for the depths of your love,
 to know your quiet constancy,
 the feast of your friendship
 that feeds me without end.

Prayers for a Planetary Pilgrim: A Personal Manual for Prayer and Ritual, Edward Hays, Forest of Peace Publishing, 1988

All: Amen.

COMMENTARY

Life can be hard under any circumstances, but God's servants have over time sometimes found it very difficult. We meet an Elijah-under-siege this week

as he escapes from the wrath of Ahab and his wife Jezebel. Paul, too, speaks this week of his own "great sorrow and constant anguish of heart" as he goes about his mission. Then there are the disciples tossed around in the boat in the middle of a storm. Finally, there's us. How many times have you been swamped by huge waves of worry, disappointment, doubt, loss, even failure; convinced that only a miracle could save you?

But Elijah discovers that God is present to him, and not in the drama of wind, earthquake or fire, but in "a tiny whispering sound", or "still small voice", as the text is sometimes translated. The disciples were sent off by themselves, alone, as it were, while Jesus goes off by himself to pray. The deeper truth of the story, however, is that he is never far off and, in fact, while the disciples are caught in the storm, he approaches unbidden. He is present even before Peter asks him to call him to come to him across the water. Peter's faith wavers, not in the absence of Jesus, but in his presence.

Whether we are under siege by the challenges of life, by illness, by the loss of a loved one or whatever; whether we are caught by great sorrow and anguish of heart over the well-being of our children or grandchildren or the financial well-being of family or ourselves, Jesus approaches before we even cry out to him, "Lord, save me!" Take courage; do not be afraid. Listen for the still small voice, the tiny whispering sound of God's presence. If God can find Elijah in the cave; if Jesus can find the disciples on a stormy sea, he can find us as well, at home, under the covers, at work, in school or wherever. Take courage; do not be afraid; Jesus stretches out his hand to save us.

FAITH SHARING AND INTEGRATION

- ◆ Recall a difficult situation in your life when the miracle of God's presence rescued you.
- ◆ When has doing God's work left you in great sorrow or anguish of heart?
- ◆ Name a time when God was present to you, but you only realized it afterwards.
- ◆ Speak of a challenging time when you took courage and were not afraid because even in the midst of the storm, you knew that Jesus was with you.

- ◆ Offer an example of how you see God working in your own life right now.

RESPONSE IN ACTION

- ◆ Reach out to someone whose life is in turmoil. Let your support be a hint of the presence of God already at work in the midst of upheaval.
- ◆ If elections are near in your area, deliberately engage others in reflective conversation, both to more carefully form your own judgments and to encourage others to look carefully at critical issues and the common good values at stake in this election.
- ◆ Set aside twenty minutes some day this week for reflection and prayer. Acknowledge the messiness of your life, its problems and challenges. Listen for the still small voice of God's presence in the midst of it all. Take courage; do not be afraid. Jesus stretches out his hand to you. Take it.

SENDING FORTH AND CLOSING PRAYER

(The leader invites members to listen for the tiny whispering sound of God's presence in their hearts. Some quiet instrumental music is played. When the music is complete, the leader extends the time of silence for a couple more minutes. After this time of quiet, the community prays as follows.)

Leader: I will hear what God proclaims;
 the Lord – for he proclaims peace.
 Near indeed is his salvation to those who fear him
 glory dwelling in our land.

All: Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation.

Leader: Kindness and truth shall meet;
 justice and peace shall kiss.
 Truth shall spring out of the earth,
 and justice shall look down from heaven.

All: Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation.

Leader: The LORD himself will give his benefits;
 our land shall yield its increase.
Justice shall walk before him,
 and prepare the way of his steps.

All: Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation.

Psalm 85:9, 10, 11-12, 13-14

(The leader invites prayers of praise, thanksgiving and petition. To each prayer, members respond, "Lord, save us." When these prayers are complete, the leader prays as follows.)

Leader: Lord, how often you are so very present to us in our helplessness and we don't realize it until after the fact. Thank you for your continued presence in our lives. Remind us often of your presence. Always keep us in your peace.

All: Amen.

