

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today's first reading from 1 Kings is instructive for us as we reflect and meditate upon how God makes his presence known to us. In popular movies and other biblical narrative depictions, God appears to the human person through a great flurry of activity and natural commotion. At the foot of Mount Horeb, the Lord appeared to Elijah and instructed him to journey atop the mountain and wait for his presence. Elijah saw heavy winds and fire and felt an earthquake, but no sign of the Lord. Elijah only felt the Lord's presence amidst a whispering sound and he went and hid. Many times the Lord does indeed make himself known to us in the hushed tones of the quiet. In this stillness, we experience the profundity of God dwelling among us. As the experience of Elijah shows us, God comes to us in unexpected and atypical ways. Our call is to be attentive to the stillness and quiet. Given our human nature and the culture in which we live, this can be quite a challenge.

In Matthew's Gospel, he describes Jesus instructing his disciples to embark on a boat ahead of him as he went atop a mountain to pray alone. In the night, the disciples experienced the boat tossing amid the waves due to a mighty wind. Jesus then appeared to them during the fourth watch, a reference to a period from late night to dawn. Imagine our own state of mind if we had to endure the fright of the disciples throughout the night. Then, against that backdrop, Jesus appeared to them. Their initial response was naturally one of fear and fright; indeed, they thought he was a ghost. He calms their fears with the exclamation, "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid."

How often have we heard this refrain from Jesus to his disciples in moments of fear and doubt? Peter, ever the leader, and perhaps weary, asks Jesus to call him out to him. Jesus responds, "Come," and Peter proceeds to meet him. Yet, when a mighty wind came upon him, he became disheartened and disbelieving and exclaimed, "Lord, save me!" Many of us would have had the same reaction as Peter, most particularly in those situations which are uncertain and which we cannot control or protect ourselves against the elements. Jesus, in a sense rebukes Peter who should know better. "O you of little faith!" How many times can we imagine Jesus uttering these very words to us. It was only when the wind died down did the disciples rest assured believing that Jesus is indeed the Son of God.

Our own life experience informs us of how our own reactions are not dissimilar from the disciples. We ardently want to believe and trust in God's providence. It is easier to do that when life is steady and copacetic, or satisfactory. The greater challenge is to experience and embolden our faith in times of darkness and difficulty. It is in these moments, perhaps so ironically, that our faith finds its deepest meaning and strength.

*The Navarre Bible: Gospels & Acts* offers this interesting analysis that can help provide some context to the meaning of Matthew's Gospel. "Storms are very frequent on Lake Gennesaret; they cause huge waves and are very dangerous to fishing boats. During his prayer on the hill, Jesus is still mindful of his disciples; he sees them trying to cope with the wind and the waves and comes to their rescue once he has finished praying. This episode has applications to Christian life.

Like the apostles' boat, the Church also gets into difficulties, and Jesus who watches over his Church comes to its rescue after allowing it to wrestle with obstacles and be strengthened in the process. He gives us encouragement: 'Take heart, it is I; have no fear'; and we show our faith and fidelity by striving to keep an even keel, and by calling on his aid when we feel ourselves weakening: 'Lord, save me', words of St. Peter which every soul uses when he has recourse to Jesus, his Saviour. Then our Lord does save us, and we urgently confess our faith: 'Truly, you are the Son of God!'" Amen.

Fr. Tom