

REFLECTIONS FOR THE 19TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME ~ 13 August 2023

The Mount ~ The Residence at Littledale

The readings from the Liturgy of the Word for the 19th Sunday in Ordinary Time could well have been named “Calm in the Midst of Chaos.” The story of Elijah in the cave on Mount Horeb, the beautiful images in Psalm 85, Paul’s intense feelings about his own tradition, and the story of Jesus and Peter walking on the water are well-known passages for Christian believers and most appropriate teachings for us in these challenging times in the Church and in the world.

A sound of sheer silence – in the passage from 1 Kings 19, the prophet Elijah is fleeing from persecution by Queen Jezebel because of his defeat of the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel. He first spends forty days and nights in the desert, supported with food and water by an angel. He then goes to the cave where God’s voice calls him to go outside where he will see God pass by. The usual and therefore expected signs of God’s presence in the Old Testament – the strong wind, the earthquake, and the fire – come, but God is not present in them. Instead, God comes in “a sound of sheer silence” (1 Kgs 19:12). And God speaks, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” (1 Kgs 19:13). We know that after this conversation, Elijah returns with confidence to continue his prophetic ministry in Israel.

Richard Rohr ofm speaks about silence so desperately needed in our lives today if we are to find God:

We need to see silence, and nothingness itself, as a kind of being in the great chain of being, maybe the first link from which all others emerge. . . John Duns Scotus, an early Franciscan, said you may speak of being with one voice from the being of the earth itself, to the waters upon the earth to the minerals within the earth, the flowers and trees and grasses, the animals, the humans, the angelic choirs, the divine. Once you stop seeing the divine in any one link of that chain, the whole thing will fall apart. It is either all God’s work or you have a hard time finding God in mere parts. That split and confused world is the postmodern world we live in today, which no longer knows how to surround and ground all things in silence. This is not an oversimplification. Either you see God in all things, or very quickly you cannot see God anywhere, even in your own species.



When was the last time you truly experienced the “sound of silence,” truly were aware of your presence with God in that special place where you and God listen to each other?

Beautiful images in Psalm 85 – in psalm 85, the psalmist uses these images to describe what it is like to walk in the way of the Lord: “Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other. Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and righteousness will look down from the sky” (Ps 85:10-11). Many of us remember an older translation of these verses: “Mercy and truth have met each other: justice and peace have kissed.” Mercy, steadfast love, faithfulness, truth, justice, peace – these are the signposts for our walking together (the theme of the Church’s Synod on Synodality). Which of these signposts are most visible in your journey in the way of the Lord? Which are most challenging for you to see right now?



Hands of Peace

[Movement for Peace](#)

Paul's intense feelings about his own tradition – the apostle Paul is deeply troubled (“great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart” – Rom 9:2) because he believes that his people, the Jewish people, have given the world so much (the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, the promises, and the patriarchs) and yet fail to realize what he believes to be the most precious gift of all, Jesus the Messiah. While we believe today that both Judaism and Christianity are both rich religious traditions with the potential to bring our world to peace and justice, we can understand Paul’s distress as he is torn between his love for Judaism and his new love for Christianity. Let us rejoice that we are seeing Paul’s two traditions come together in so many ways today to bring about a better world. In January 2023, Roman Catholics, Jews and Muslims (led by the Pontifical Academy for Life and the Renaissance Foundation) endorsed a document, “AI Ethics: an Abrahamic commitment to the Rome Call,” a joint call for algorithms to guide the design of artificial intelligence in the increasingly urgent need to promote a culture that places this technology at the service of the common good of all and of the care of our common home. The two technology giants, IBM and Microsoft, are also signatory to this declaration.

Jesus and Peter walking on the water – the story of Jesus walking on the water is told in Matthew (14:22-27), Mark (6:54-53), and John (6:15-21). All three Gospel writers tell the story after Jesus has just finished curing many and feeding the five thousand with bread and fish. He is tired and needs to find his God in silence, “He made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray” (Matt 14:22-23). In Matthew’s narration, we are twice told that Jesus is alone, reminding us that Jesus needs this time alone with his God.

The three versions speak about the storm coming up suddenly, about the disciples being frightened, about Jesus’ walking to them over the water, about Jesus’ words to them (“Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.”), and about their safe rescue. Only Matthew speaks about Peter’s actions, the conversation between Peter and Jesus, and the disciples’ words, “Truly you are the Son of God” (Matt 14:33).

It is not difficult to see the echo of God’s words in the book of Isaiah, “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you” (Is 43:1-2).

***Hand of Christ-
The Palm of
Peace***
[Gallen-Kallela,](#)
[Akseli](#)



In our Church and world today, we are almost overwhelmed by natural disasters, by loss of faith in leaders and institutions, by growing inequities among people, by loss of hope, by violence, by wars. The storm at sea is a metaphor for the environment in which we find ourselves, one that can easily lead to despair and hopelessness. We are Peter. Even when we find hope, it often takes very little for us to lose it again. Matthew's telling of the storm at sea is a reminder that our God is always with us. Pope Francis speaks to us about this message:

This Gospel narrative is an invitation to abandon ourselves trustingly to God in every moment of our life, especially in the moment of trial and turmoil. When we have strong feelings of doubt and fear and we seem to be sinking, in life's difficult moments where everything becomes dark, we must not be ashamed to cry out like Peter: "Lord, save me" (Matt 14:3), to knock on God's heart, on Jesus's heart. "Lord, save me." It is a beautiful prayer! We can repeat it many times. "Lord, save me." And Jesus's gesture, who immediately reaches out His hand and grasps that of his friend, should be contemplated at length: this is Jesus. Jesus does this. Jesus is the Father's hand who never abandons us, the strong and faithful hand of the Father, who always and only wants what is good for us. ... Jesus wanted to teach this to Peter and the disciples, and also to us today. In dark moments, in sad moments he is well aware that our faith is weak – all of us are people of little faith, all of us, myself included, everyone and that our faith is weak our journey can be troubled, hindered by adverse forces. But he is the Risen One! Let's not forget this: he is the Lord who passed through death in order to lead us to safety.

We conclude our reflections with this lovely poem-prayer by Thom Shuman, one that reminds us of our strengths in the midst of doubts, our dreams in the midst of fears, our goodness in the midst of frailty.

Here, in this place, God welcomes all the dreamers, as well as the doubters:
here, the worriers and wanderers can call on God by name.
Here, in this time, we can remember all the ways God has graced us:
here, in these moments, we are reminded that God is with us, always!
Here are gathered those daring enough to step out of comfort into the unknown:

here, in this faith space, we will find the courage to cry out, 'God, save us!' in every situation.
Making sandwiches and stirring the soup for the hungry lined up at the door;
taking the night shift at the homeless shelter;
talking with the prisoners awaiting their trials:
you surround us with signs of your hopes for all, God of justice.

Bringing reconciliation to strife-torn communities;
mending the broken promises which have shattered lives;
holding your arms wide open to embrace weary searchers:
everywhere we turn, we hear people say, 'here comes that Dreamer!'"

Inviting us to wander down the streets of sacrifice;
hoping that every breath will be filled with peace and hope;
gifting us with joy and grace, so they can be freely given away:
you nudge us to get out of our comfortable religion,
and to walk on those unfamiliar waves of faith and hope, Spirit of trust.

During this week, let us take the time to listen to the sound of silence. Let us find calm in the chaos around us. Let us be grateful for the diversity of religious traditions in our world. Let us rejoice that we are the dreams and the doubters, the worriers and the wanderers, the beloved ones of a compassionate God.

