

HOMILY for 19th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year A

In the Bible, the people of God were told that God dwelt in the Synagogues & the Temples. They would come there to meet God & ask for help. The Temple priests would make animal sacrifices & offerings to God in those sacred places on behalf of the people of God. They all tried to meet God & have a divine experience. But, none of them had ever had an encounter with God. The closest divine experience that they had ever seen was to have their sacrifices or offerings as a sign of divine approval. Abraham was the luckiest one who could hear the voice of God telling him to make a personal sacrifice of his only son to God, & later replacing him with a ram. Yet, God remains elusive & mysterious to the people of God & the rest of the world.

That explains why Prophet Elijah had trouble of identifying God in the world. Here is how this Sunday's First Reading tells us about his trouble: "Elijah came to a cave [from the mountain of God in Horeb], where he took shelter. Then, the Lord said, 'Go outside & stand on the mountain before the Lord; the Lord will be passing by.' A strong & heavy wind was rending the mountains & crushing rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind, there was an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake, there was fire; but the Lord was not in the fire. After the fire, there was a tiny whispering sound. When he heard this, Elijah hid his face in his cloak & went to stand at the entrance of the cave." So, apparently the Lord let Prophet Elijah know that He would pass by. Prophet Elijah tried to look for the Lord in a strong & heavy wind, then in an earthquake; & finally in a fire because those typically represent power & might on earth. Naturally Prophet Elijah assumed that he could find the Lord in those powerful phenomena of Creation. Surprisingly he did not see the Lord there. Rather, he found the Lord in a tiny whispering sound. That finding did not only surprise Prophet Elijah but also make him question all his past knowledge & assumptions about the Lord.

But, Prophet Elijah was not the only person who found the Lord much more differently than he thought. This Sunday's Gospel lets us know about other people of the New Testament who could not recognize the Lord in their daily life. Here is how it describes their experience: "...Meanwhile, the boat, already several hundred yards out from shore, was being tossed about in the waves raised by strong head winds. At about three in the morning, he [Jesus] came walking toward them on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking toward them on the water, they were terrified. 'It is a ghost!' they said, & in their fear they began to cry out. Jesus hastened to reassure them: 'Get hold of yourselves! It is I. Do not be afraid!'" It continues, "...Peter spoke up & said, 'Lord, if it is really you, tell me to come to you across the water.' 'Come!' he said. So, Peter got out of the boat & began to walk on the water, moving toward Jesus. But, when he perceived how strong the wind was, becoming frightened he began to sink, & cried out, 'Lord, save me!' Jesus at once stretched out his hand & caught him. 'How little faith you have!' he exclaimed 'why did you falter?'" So, evidently all the disciples could not recognize their master walking on the water at night even after being with Him for quite some time before. They thought that they saw a ghost. Meanwhile, Peter wanted to check out Jesus & see if it was really him. He asked Jesus to let him walk on water toward Him. But, about half way he had doubt & began to sink. He had to call out to Jesus to save him.

Like Prophet Elijah & the early disciples, we might not be able to recognize Jesus in our daily life. Due to our many assumptions about Him, we might not be able to identify Jesus in

many situations. Or, we might overlook God's presence as expect to meet God in a certain way. That's why we've heard many stories in our Christian tradition on how Jesus disguised Himself to challenge His followers to see things differently. Or, God might do a miracle to help the people of God change their typical way of seeing things. So, we got to have an open mind & a welcoming heart if we want to meet Jesus or encounter God in every situation of our daily life. When we have that kind of attitude, we can see Jesus in the least expected places or encounter God in the less likely moments.

My dear brothers & sisters, God is always with us & all around us. Jesus can be seen inside & outside of churches. If we have a mind open to God's revelations every day & a heart desiring to have a divine experience all the time, we will surely encounter God or meet Jesus every moment of our day. We might have one of those experiences at a grocery store or on a leisure walk as we try to tune into Jesus & search for Him every moment of our day.