

NINETEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Horeb = HOHR-eb

A bracing and poetic reading, with the quality of both a myth and a parable. There is a magical clarity that defines it.

Elijah = ee-LĪ-juh

The rhythm here is important, especially the "Lord was not . . ."

LECTIONARY #115

READING I 1 Kings 19:9a, 11–13a

A reading from the first Book of Kings

At the **mountain of God, Horeb,**

Elijah came to a cave where he took shelter.

Then the **LORD said** to him,

"Go outside and stand on the mountain before the LORD; the LORD will be passing by."

A strong and heavy wind was rending the mountains and 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

and went and stood at the entrance of the cave.

READING I

Today's first reading is the story of Elijah's encounter with God. To better understand this reading, we should know that Elijah was a prophet of God in the time of King Ahab, whose wife was Jezebel, a foreigner and worshiper of Baal. After Elijah slayed the prophets of Baal in the Wadi Kishon in Galilee, Jezebel vowed to kill him, so he ran all the way to Beer-sheba, a distance of more than one hundred miles, and escaped into the wilderness, where he laid down under a broom tree and prayed for death. Miraculously, an angel came to wake him and tell him to eat

and drink what was left for him. When the angel came again to waken him, Elijah was told again to eat and drink in preparation for a journey, which takes him to Mount Horeb, also known as Sinai (1 Kings 19:1–8).

Having arrived at Horeb, God asks Elijah what he's doing there. Elijah responds with a complaint about how God's people had abandoned the covenant, destroyed God's altars, and killed his prophets. Elijah adds, "I alone remain, and they seek to take my life" (1 Kings 19:10). Arriving at the beginning of our first reading, we hear God telling Elijah to go out and stand on the mountain

before God. The phrase "stand before the Lord" is another way of saying that Elijah is being called to service. The fierce wind, earthquake, and fire are all accompaniments to a theophany—a manifestation of the divine—but it is only in the "tiny whispering sound" that Elijah knows God's presence. Thus, he emerged from the cave but hid his face because ancients believed that no one could see God face to face and live. Today, too, we might not see God face to face, but we can see God's activity in the world if we look attentively. Where is God at work in your life?

For meditation and context:

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 85:9, 10, 11–12, 13–14 (8)

R. Lord, let us see your kindness, and grant us your salvation.

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.

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.

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

READING II Romans 9:1–5

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans

Brothers and sisters:

I speak the **truth in Christ, I do not lie,**
my conscience joins with the Holy Spirit in bearing
me witness
that I have great sorrow and constant anguish in my heart.
For I could **wish that I myself were accursed** and cut off
from Christ
for the **sake of my own people,**
my kindred according to the flesh.
They are **Israelites;**
theirs the adoption, the glory, the covenants,
the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises;
theirs the patriarchs, and from them,
according to the flesh, is the Christ,
who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen.

Even emphasis on “do not lie.”

Note the unusual rhythm/rhetoric of the phrases beginning with “theirs.”

Slight pause between “all” and “God.”

Strong emphasis on the whole phrase, “over all, God blessed forever.”

READING II Our second reading is a continuation of Paul’s Letter to the Romans, which we have been hearing during recent Sundays in Ordinary Time. This reading is the opening section of a long diatribe that extends from Romans 9:1 through 11:36. Although our modern understanding of diatribe usually has negative connotations and anger associated with it, in literature and during the time period of Paul, a diatribe is a type of argument in which the speaker, or writer in this case, imagines a hypothetical respondent who challenges the speaker or asks questions of him at different

points in the argument. The speaker or writer’s responses then become the starting point for another section of the argument. Paul’s concern is immediately evident. He is worried about his fellow Jews who have not accepted Jesus Christ as the messiah and have not joined the Jesus movement. Hopefully you can get a sense of the profound grief and anguish that he carries in his heart. He says that he would rather be cut off from Christ—the worst possible thing that Paul could imagine—for the sake of his people. He also lists seven privileges that God has given to the chosen people and

adds an eighth—the sending of Christ, the preeminent descendant of the patriarchs—whom some of his Jewish brethren refuse to accept. At the end of Paul’s diatribe, he will conclude that the reason for his Jewish brethren’s rejection of Jesus is to make it possible for the expansion of God’s covenant to include the Gentiles.

GOSPEL

Today’s Gospel reading tells the story of another theophany or manifestation of the divine. In Matthew’s Gospel, this story appears immediately after the first of two miracles of the

This reading depicts such a vivid scene, it's like a short film.

That Jesus is alone suggests something of the power he is feeling/gathering.

Seeing Jesus, the disciples are truly frightened. Fear is the mood of this reading.

The disciples' fear is contrasted by Jesus telling them not to be afraid.

Once again, fright.

When Jesus rebukes Peter for his doubt, he seems especially to be calling him out for letting his fear master him.

multiplication of loaves and fishes (Matthew 14:13–21 and 15:32–39). In this reading, Jesus first directs his disciples to go to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, away from the crowds that had gathered in the wilderness and were fed from the five loaves and two fish. Then he goes off by himself to pray. The Sea of Galilee is a large freshwater lake measuring approximately thirty-three miles in circumference. Because of its geography, nighttime storms on the lake are common even today.

The narrator of this story tells us that the boat that holds the disciples is already

GOSPEL Matthew 14:22–33

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

After he had fed the people, Jesus made the disciples get into a **boat**

and **precede** him to the other side, while he **dismissed** the crowds.

After **doing** so, he went **up** on the **mountain** by **himself** to **pray**. When it was **evening** he was there **alone**.

Meanwhile the **boat**, already a few miles offshore, was being **tossed about** by the **waves**, for the **wind** was **against** it.

During the **fourth watch** of the **night**, he came **toward** them **walking** on the sea.

When the **disciples** saw him **walking** on the sea they were **terrified**.

"It is a **ghost**," they said, and they cried **out** in fear.

At once Jesus spoke to them, "Take **courage**, it is **I**; do **not** be **afraid**."

Peter said to him in **reply**,

"**Lord**, if it is **you**, **command** me to **come** to you on the **water**."

He said, "**Come**."

Peter got **out** of the **boat** and began to **walk** on the **water** toward **Jesus**.

But when he saw how strong the **wind** was he became **frightened**;

and, **beginning** to **sink**, he cried out, "**Lord**, **save** me!"

Immediately Jesus stretched out his **hand** and caught **Peter**, and **said** to him, "**O** you of little **faith**, **why** did you **doubt**?"

After they got into the **boat**, the **wind** died **down**.

Those who were in the **boat** did him **homage**, saying, "**Truly**, you are the **Son** of **God**."

a few miles offshore when Jesus observes their predicament, presumably because of the high winds that they are encountering. He went out to them very early in the morning, likely before or close to dawn. The disciples must have been exhausted after fighting the storm all night. But then they see a figure walking toward them on the water and are beside themselves in fear. Stormy water suggested that its monsters were exerting their powers. They thought this figure was a ghost or a haunting spirit, but finally when Jesus spoke, they realized it was Jesus.

The scene in which Peter asks Jesus to have him come to Jesus across the water is only in Matthew's Gospel (compare it with Mark 6:45–52). Peter is extremely enthusiastic at first, but he quickly doubts and begins to sink into the water. Finally, when Jesus calms the storm, they know his true identity, because only God can control the forces of nature. Thus, the disciples bow down in worship and acknowledge him as the Son of God. C.C.