

Homily. 19th Sunday in Ordinary Time. Year. A. 12/13 August 2023.

Mt. Carmel overlooks the fertile Plain of Sharon along the Mediterranean coast near modern day Haifa. The names themselves make this sound like a lovely place to be. It is one of the spots that very ancient human beings chose to settle, leaving behind a treasure trove of Palaeolithic archaeological discoveries for our times. The history of Mt. Carmel though has its darker shades. To the South East lies the valley of Megiddo, the site of many great battles and said to be the spot for the last great battle between God, good and evil, the Armageddon before the end time.

It was on Mt. Carmel in the 9th century BC that Elijah, the Prophet of God, took on the prophets and followers of the false gods called Baal. Through a display of confident faith and fire God consumed the offering sacrifice of Elijah while the Baal offering was rejected and left untouched. Victorious but exhausted, we might even say depressed, Elijah couldn't see what there was left for him to do. After the noise and fiery drama atop Mt. Carmel he wandered Southward into the desert's silence and oblivion.

There it was that he heard God's call to journey even further to a more ancient mountain, that of Horeb, otherwise called Sinai, the place of God, Moses and the giving of the Jewish law. It was from within a sheltered cave there that he saw and heard great manifestations of God's power; rock shattering winds, earthquakes and fires, but God wasn't in any of them. This time only the gentle breeze, a quiet whispering sound, held God's mystery and presence. It was in this quiet that Elijah's faith was refreshed and renewed. Faith flows and goes and then flows back again.

Jesus, walking on the water of the windswept rough Sea of Galilee, appeared like a ghost out of the darkness to the tired disciples who were rowing hard yet going nowhere. Certainly, if this ever happened to us we'd be just as terrified as they were. After letting them know who he was, no ghost at all, Peter rode a wave of faith, wanting to walk across the waters to Jesus. Why not, for faith makes the impossible, possible.

It all started out well enough until the full force of the wind hit him, then focusing inwards on himself and his fear, not on Jesus his Lord and goal, he began to sink into the swirling deeps. This time, not on mountains of fire or in a whispering voice, but on a familiar sea turned to chaos, Peter cried out for help and salvation. He was heard instantly. Jesus hand reached out to catch him and pulling him up he was saved, faith renewed.

If we face our fears with faith that's focused on Jesus, be they fears of those opposed to us or fears of the many dramas and storms of living, then we can defeat Baals, walk on water and meet God in a holy place. If, hidden in a cave of our worries and sadness or overcome by tiredness and doubts our faith fails and we sink down into our fears, what we've got to do is yell out for help. Jesus will be there, his saving help right at hand, help that we need to accept in whatever way and form it's offered, for therein lies our salvation. Yes, it's true that our faith does come and go, but it can also come alive again and each time it does so it's stronger than before and we the wiser and more grateful for for the gift, as we are here now in the presence of our Lord.