

August 13, 2017

1 Kgs 19:19a, 11-13a; Rom 9:1-15, Mt 14:22-33

What do meeting God on the mountain and meeting God in the valley on a lake have in common? There's more than one way that we can meet God - but unless we learn how to recognize God, we can miss noticing God's presence. Meeting God on the mountain is a common theme in scripture. Abraham goes up to a mountain to offer sacrifice, and Moses meets God in the burning bush on a mountain. It is to the mountain that all the people return after being saved from slavery in Egypt to worship God and receive the law. Jesus often goes up to the mountain to pray to the Father. We come to meet God on the mountain as a community at Mass - worshiping and receiving the presence of God in the Body and Blood of Jesus. Yet we *also* are called to encounter God on the mountain when we engage in our personal prayer, pray together as a group of friends or as a family, come to confession, or participate in devotions such as Eucharistic adoration. In addition to these mountain encounters, where we meet God in a special way, we also encounter God in the valley places of everyday life. We are touched by God through events that occur in life, and through the way in which God enters these events. All of these encounters help us to recognize the voice of God, and come to know God's action in our lives.

Speaking of mountain experiences and knowing the voice of God ... in the first reading we hear that Elijah is on the run. Queen Jezebel has told him that she is going to be sure he is killed, so he takes off. He is desperate and wants to give up - in fact he just wants to die, but God sends an angel to him to strengthen him. God then leads him up from the valley of his troubles to the mountain so they can have an encounter. He knows God is planning to visit with him and tell him what the next move is - so he sits and waits quietly in a cave on the mountain for God to come by. While in the cave he hears wind crushing the rocks, an earthquake, and fire. Anyone else might say: "O Good, here is God he is going to go kick some butt and get me out of this mess." But Elijah stays in the cave and doesn't go out, he knows that this is not God. His many mountain experiences have taught him to recognize God. When he hears a tiny whispering sound he knows this voice. God came to meet him in gentleness, solitude, and quiet. In the quiet of that encounter God tells him what to do. He returns to the valley and lives.

In the Gospel, Jesus has just finished feeding the crowds who came to him in the valley - they were needing something, they didn't know where to turn, they had their problems - they were looking to be filled. God as man in Jesus Christ meets them in the ordinary events of the

valley, amid their need, their confusion, and their hunger - he comes to enter the events of their lives. Jesus feeds the thousands of people and takes care of their needs both spiritually and materially and then he goes to the mountain to pray alone. After dealing with the situations of life, Jesus himself goes to the mountain to enjoy contact with God in solitude and quiet. Before and after encounters in the valley - we need to go to the mountain to be renewed and to give thanks. St. John Chrysostom says about this passage: *For what purpose does He go up into the mountain? To teach us, that [solitude] and [relaxation] is good, when we ... pray to God.*

Meanwhile, down in the valley on the lake, the disciples are having a rough time. They are being tossed by waves and the wind is against them - they are fighting against obstacles that are holding them back. We all know how that feels! Although there are powerful waves and wind and drama all around, God is not in these things - just like God was not in the earthquake and fire in Elijah's story. These things represent the turmoil of life that we all can get absorbed in and that can get way of meeting Jesus. Every day, I have to be sure that all the things I am dealing with don't take my focus from Jesus - as they easily could, and actually do sometimes - I don't always get it right. The disciples placing their focus on these things, their absorption in these things, their fear of these things nearly makes them miss Jesus when he comes to them.

Jesus comes calmly and unfazed by the storm, walking on the water. Strengthened by his mountain experience, these things don't frighten him, and they can't make him sink. The disciples, who have spent too much time in the valley are afraid, say "it is a ghost" - they are still so absorbed in worry and distracted that they fail to see Jesus clearly through all the mess. Peter has a moment of clarity and trust, he says: "**IF** it is you command me to come to you on the water. Jesus calmly tells him to come - "come on, just walk trustingly and calmly through the craziness." In all the turmoil Peter steps out of the boat and heads towards Jesus. As long as he calmly focus on Jesus he stays afloat. But he takes his focus off Jesus and is distracted by that craziness and he begins to sink. Jesus is right there to pick him up - yet notice - Peter had to turn to him and ask for the help and put his hand out in the right direction. Peter needed to remember who he met many times on the mountain - and focus back on Jesus and reach out to him.

God meets us on the mountain, and comes to us in our need in the valley of everyday life. A lot of times, God comes in subtle ways (like a small whispering sound). If we don't join God on the mountain regularly, and learn to recognize that voice, we may not notice Jesus when he comes to us calmly during our storms of life. We may be so focused on the craziness that we miss the quiet voice calling us. As long as we all spend regular time on the mountain we'll learn where to turn when we are sinking - and where to reach out for the hand of God to pull us up.