

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson
13th August 2023 - 19th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings (Year A): 1st: 1 Kings 19:9,11-13. 2nd: Romans 9:1-5. **Gospel:** Matthew 14:22-33.

Climate change is daily brought before us, with the extreme heat in the Mediterranean and elsewhere, the raging fires devastating various countries and islands, and esp. these past few days Hawaii: terrific storms and down pours with dreadful floods: while here St Swithun is proving pretty accurate, with these weeks of a very unsettled period.

I'm sure we all find it incredibly hard to imagine how, following such destruction, where do people start to begin rebuilding their lives.

Some people think that if you have enough faith, life will be all plain sailing. At some time or other we all face difficult and trying circumstances and situations in our lives. Faith does not shield us from the harsh knocks of life.

At those times it is as if the Lord is asking us to walk on the water. But at the same time he stretches out his hand and holds us up.

At first glance, it might well seem that Elijah and Peter were unnecessarily seeking out danger. In both cases things have gone badly for them and they seem to be regretting it.

Elijah is on the run for his life. In his service of the true God he has offended the pagan queen Jezebel. She is determined to have him killed, and he has had enough. A beaten and broken man he just wants to resign as God's prophet; he's sick of life itself and he asks God to let him die. In his cave he experienced the presence of God: not in the earthquake, wind and fire, but the sound of a gentle breeze, and is given strength to carry on.

Peter too, on the basis of faith, finds himself in a dangerous spot. Seeing Jesus walking on the water, he wants to join Jesus, if it is really him. Peter does manage to begin but the wind and waves quickly blow away his faith and he starts to sink. Like Elijah he fears for his life. Yet Peter knew that whatever Jesus commanded was possible.

Was it a way of testing Peter? They had all seen Jesus cure people, teach them, feed 5000 with five loaves and two fish. Peter has no doubt that what Jesus commands will happen. But the command needs a response, and we learn that the success of the response depends on his faith.

Peter has no choice but to leave the boat and risk his life to learn perhaps the most valuable lesson; the realisation of both his own weakness and the power of Jesus.

Paul too, as we know shipwrecked on a few occasions, yet has such an overwhelming experience of God in Christ that he is prepared to make any sacrifice so that others may share that faith.

To live by faith means to trust God and rely on God's power.
God won't carry us, but he will hold us up if we let go.

Peter is the model of a very human journey of faith.
He seeks, he steps, he falls, he is saved, he praises, and it all repeats again.

Every time Peter tried to show his faith, he failed: He betrayed Jesus verbally; he ran away; he took the side of Satan; and today he took his eyes off Jesus and began to sink.

But every time he fell and his faith failed, he rose up again, and became closer to Christ. He had the good sense to call out for help, and heard those most comforting and strengthening words of Jesus:

'Courage! It is I! Do not be afraid.'

The sea is often used as a metaphor of life, and our Catholic Church as the Barque of Peter. Today's readings are saying no matter how dark life may be, and no matter how high the waves are or how rough the sea, Jesus is able to reach us and able to lift us out of life's trauma, if only we trust him totally and keep our eyes firmly fixed in him. When our faith is weak, or when it goes completely, we can still be like Peter and call out: "Lord save me!"

And we too will hear '**Courage! It is I! Do not be afraid.**'

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