

19th Sunday, Year A, St. Xavier Church, 1 Kings 19:9a, 11–13a; Ps. 85:9–14;
Rom. 9:1–5; Matt. 14:22–33

Fr. Ward Biemans SJ

Dear brothers and sisters, it often seems in our world that if there's a lot of noise, something important must be about to happen. News reports are often repeated over and over. Advertisements come at you in such a way that they immediately grab your attention. People who cling to ideologies often shout out their wishes.

With the prophet Elijah in the first reading, things are different. Here, after all, it is a revelation of God. At first, Elijah does experience the power of God—first in a violent storm, then in an earthquake, and afterward in fire. But God does not reveal himself in these signs until later, and this is heralded by the rustling of a gentle breeze. Elijah knows immediately that God is present in this breeze, for he covers his face with his cloak. After all, no one could see God and remain alive, as Moses had already revealed. God Himself is therefore not found in the noise, nor in natural disasters, but in a gentle breeze. Elijah listens to Him and knows what he must do.

In the Gospel, too, it is striking that Jesus first sends the disciples away and then dismisses the crowd, so that He can pray alone. Last week, in the story of the miraculous multiplication of the loaves, we heard that Jesus sailed in a boat to a secluded place to be alone. But then a large crowd followed Him. Now He sends the crowd away and spends time alone with God on a mountain. Apparently, He considers it very important to be able to pray. If Jesus Himself considers it so important, how much more do we need it? So, let's set aside time for prayer, early in the morning when we're alone, or in the evening, or before we are going to sleep. And let's find a suitable place for this, just as Jesus went up the mountain.

It could very well be a spot in our home, with a candle, a crucifix, or an icon—a place where we feel at home to lay our thanks, our questions, and our concerns before God, to read some psalms or other Bible passages, and to listen to what He has to say to us.

How important, dear friends, it is to teach this to children as well. If they don't know how to find peace in God, how can they resist all the noise around them? Does it strike you as strange that all sorts of conditions are being

diagnosed in children these days—from ADHD to autism and dyslexia—when children are constantly being stimulated to experience all sorts of things but have few, if any, moments of deep, inner peace? This is not to say, of course, that these things didn't occur in the past, but back then, rest and prayer were often much more normal.

When we turn back to the Gospel, we see that the disciples watch Jesus coming toward them on foot across the lake, and they are completely bewildered. That's not so strange, of course. But Jesus immediately reassures them. "Do not be afraid," He says to them. Saint Peter, somewhat presumptuously, asks Jesus to tell him to walk on the water as well. And indeed, at Jesus' word, he does so. But despite Jesus' admonition not to be afraid, he still becomes frightened and is in danger of drowning. The question Jesus asks Peter—"You of little faith, why did you doubt?"—may also serve as an encouragement for us to continue trusting in Him at all times.

Brothers and sisters, all sorts of things can happen in our lives, and we, just like the disciples in the boat, may face headwinds. Some people experience disappointing results in their work. Others are dealing with a difficult relationship, with illness or may have lost loved ones. Many people are worried about the future, whether because of climate change, migration, or the threat of war. It is precisely then that it is so important to turn to God with our concerns and ask Him to remain with us and help us. We must not give up, but get up and keep going. And above all, we must pray for our neighbors and for people in need. In the second reading, we heard that Saint Paul experiences sorrow and pain in his heart because he is unable to bring his brothers and kinsmen to faith in Jesus Christ. It is a pain that many of us will also know when people in our own circle do not accept the faith or let it go after a while. But St. Paul prays fervently that God will save them. We can do the same. After all, such salvation is not in our power, but in God's. He is blessed forever. Amen.