

Homily for the 19th Sunday in Ordinary Time. Saturday, August 6, 2011

Readings:

1 Kings 19:9a, 11-13 (Elijah hears God in a gentle breeze)

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 85 (Kindness and truth shall meet; justice and peace shall kiss)

Romans 9:1-5 (Paul's anguish for his own people)

Matthew 14:22-33 (Jesus walks on the sea, and pulls Peter out of the water)

♪ Speak, Lord, I love to listen to your voice. See, Lord, here I am.

My heart is silent, Lord. My soul is still, Waiting upon your voice. Tell me your will.

Empty, I place myself before your face. Touch me now in the silence of faith. ♪

Jesus lived that song. He listened for God's call, and followed it - whether it led to feeding more than 5,000 people, as we heard in last Sunday's Gospel, or going up a mountain to spend time in prayer, as he does at the beginning of today's Gospel.

Elijah was a prophet - someone who spoke what he heard God calling him to say. That was not always easy for him- sometimes he met with resistance and even persecution. Just before today's story, he was so depressed that he sat down and decided he wanted to die. God sent angels to feed him. Earlier, God had sent ravens and then a poor widow to take care of him. Elijah always had to listen first, before he spoke. And God did not always speak in ways that he expected. In the first reading he was expecting a loud show of power from God, and he was surprised to hear God speaking in a the still, small voice of a gentle breeze.

Paul heard the call to bring the Good News to the whole human race, but he was "in great sorrow and constant anguish" as we hear in the 2nd reading, because so many of his own people refused to listen.

Peter heard the call to follow Jesus, jumped out of the boat and began to sink when he took his eyes off the Lord - and Jesus pulled him up.

What is God calling you to do today? Where is Christ calling me to go?
Be careful when you ask that question, because God will answer you,
and you may not like the answer.

Fr. Mychal Judge was a member of my Franciscan community. He had ministered at Siena College and in NJ parishes, but in 2001 he was the Friar Chaplain for the NY City Fire Dept. He prayed to know what God wanted many times over the course of his life. On September 11, he was called to minister with firefighters at the twin towers and died when they collapsed.

This was the prayer he would pray every day:

*"Lord, Take me where you want me to go; Let me meet who you want me to meet;
Tell me what you want me to say, And keep me out of your way." Amen.*

Sr. Anna and I were responding to God's call when we started Bethany Ministries. It took months of quiet prayer and discernment, and, like Peter in the Gospel, we have been pulled out of the water many times since 1995. In January, 1996, the Schoharie creek flooded and my house by the creek became my house in the creek. But through the grace of God the water stopped one inch short of coming through the front door, and the house was not damaged except for losing the skirting around my double wide mobile home.

In the fall of 2000, Sr. Anna began to work full time doing parish missions and retreats for Bethany Ministries, even though we had no idea whether the ministry could financially support two people, and we have been in the black every year since then, if only by a few dollars. This year we made it by \$1.07 as our fiscal year ended on June 30

[for more of the story of the 1st 6 months of 2011, check our Newsletter page "2011 mid year update"].

The most recent example of God's providence happened this past January. I was in Maryland for the Chapter of Holy Name Province the week of January 3rd. While I was there, I retrieved a call on my home answering machine from a Baptist minister I had not seen in almost 20 years. Harry had read our newsletter and saw that we were looking for a car and offered to donate a 2001 Subaru Forester to Bethany Ministries. I called to tell Anna about it on Thursday, January 6th.

She offered to pick me up at the Catskill exit, since I was riding back with some Friars from Siena on Friday, Jan. 7th. She was driving the car which we share from Middleburgh to pick me up when she hit some slush and skidded into the left lane. The car spun around & hit a tree, but she was not injured. The car, however, was a total loss.

That event began a wonderful process of finding out that when God gives a call, the Holy Spirit always gives the power to respond to it. Several members of the Bethany Ministries web of relationships were God's "angels" to help us do our ministry while waiting for the promised Subaru. One of them loaned us her van so we could travel to Morris where I was covering the weekend Mass, because the pastor had died the day after Christmas. The rest of the winter, we thanked God every time we had to drive through snow in our new all wheel drive vehicle. [for more of this story, check our Reflections page, "The Emmaus journey of a car"]

Today is the anniversary of dropping the atom Bomb on Hiroshima. Sixty six years ago both Hiroshima & Nagasaki were devastated. What is God's calling us to see & do as we remember that event? What boat are we being called to step out of? Where is our true security, as individuals and even as a nation? The psalm says *"Justice and peace shall kiss, truth shall spring out of the earth, and justice shall look down from heaven."*

I hear an echo of Psalm 85 - the one we prayed today - and the sound of God's truth in the prophetic words of Archbishop Francis Chullikatt, Apostolic Nuncio to the United Nations. With full knowledge of Pope Benedict, he spoke these words on July 1st:

"Viewed from a legal, political, security and most of all - moral - perspective, there is no justification today for the continued maintenance of nuclear weapons."

"With development needs across the globe far outpacing the resources being devoted to address them, the thought of pouring hundreds of billions of additional dollars into the world's nuclear arsenals is nothing short of sinful. It is the grossest misplacement of priorities and truly constitutes the very 'theft from the poor' which the Second Vatican Council condemned so long ago."

Are we being called as a human race to put our trust somewhere else than in the power of nuclear weapons? Or in any power other than God?

Whose voice are you listening to? Who do you trust? TV news anchors? Political leaders? Condemnations on the internet of one group or person or another?

Or do you trust in the voice of God within you, the wisdom of Church teaching and the Word of God that Jesus still speaks, even when it seems as small as the gentle breeze that touched Elijah.

How can we keep living God's love and truth?

How can we keep trusting?

How can we keep stepping out of the boat?

We open the ears of our hearts to God through prayer, asking God every day, "What do want me to do today?"

We discern how to answer God's call by trusting, as Paul did that God does not give a call without giving the power to follow it.

We respond to God's invitation by taking action, even when it seems foolish to the world, even when, like Peter, I may make a mistake - because Jesus is there to take my hand and pull me up.

I began with a sung prayer asking God to speak. God has spoken clearly through the prophet Micah, (Micah 6:8) and his words are a fitting ending to this homily:

♪ WE ARE CALLED TO ACT WITH JUSTICE, WE ARE CALLED TO LOVE TENDERLY.
WE ARE CALLED TO SERVE ONE ANOTHER; TO WALK HUMBLY WITH GOD. ♪