

Homily, Province Jubilees,

August 12, 2023

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Today we come together to celebrate the years of service that these four men have given to the Province and the Church. I always like to add up the total number of years and this year it is 155! That is great total. I express my congratulations to them.

In the first reading we hear the familiar story of God coming to Elijah. God tells him to “Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.”

What would be going through your mind if you were told to wait for the Lord who is about to pass by? What did Elijah know about the presence of God? Had he been in the Lord’s presence before this time?

The reading tells us that first, there was a great and powerful wind that tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but guess what? The LORD was not in the wind that could smash rocks! God did not show himself in that manner.

Second disaster: after the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. How unsettling to be in an earthquake as the rocks slide away around you. But still God was not in that tremendous force of nature.

Third, after the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. We see forests burning around the world today. We can see the devastation that fire has and the impact it has on those who lose their homes and belongings. We can even smell the smoke and see the haze like we were in the midst of the fire which is miles away.

But after the fire there came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave. Then a voice said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” And God proceeds to tell him what he needs him to do.

Catastrophic happenings did not reveal God to Elijah. God was not going to do fancy footwork to get his attention. No big wind or strong earthquake can describe the identify of God to Elijah. All of the problems Elijah was confronting from the Israelites was for him like a fire, wind or earthquake. But God came in the whisper with gentleness of heart.

At times someone who becomes a religious will compare their call to service in the Church like the one that Elijah experienced. In a whisper God tells them the truth that they are called to change their lives. It does not matter how softly the call from God is spoken; it is specially given in a way that the person can hear it.

And as with Elijah there is a certainty in the call of God that calms the person being called removing the distractions of everyday life so that they can follow God’s call.

In the gospel Christ foresaw the storm and the grave risk His Apostles would run when He sent them off across the lake. But that trial and the grave danger they ran into was for their own good, because they learned to realize that Jesus was from God and they could always trust Him. The dangers the Apostles faced on the water foreshadowed those they would endure as followers of Jesus. There would be good times and difficult times in their call to be apostles.

Our troubles in life are like the growing pains of our youth — they are necessary if we are to arrive at our full stature as followers of Jesus. They form us, they mold us and shape our religious character and bring us closer to God.

But — we have to allow life's ups and downs to shape us. God is calling each of us to a relationship with him through Jesus. Religious life is a call to be of service to those in most need of God's love. Each one is called service.

The gospel reading contrasts with the first reading. Here we experience a strong Jesus who can bring calm in a storm by his command. The reading gives us detail about the encounter of Jesus walking on the water. It was *during the fourth watch of the night, Jesus came toward them walking on the sea. When the disciples saw him walking on the sea they were terrified. "It is a ghost," they said, and they cried out in fear. At once Jesus spoke to them, "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid"* as he said to the waters be calm.

If we take the time to examine our lives we see times of crisis when we are adrift in the storms of life. These are opportunities to call out to Jesus to calm the waters of our lives and rescue us. Jesus is present in our lives during good times and difficult ones. In St. Peter we see the weakness and the strength of his faith in Jesus.

Today let us join in this jubilee celebration. We know that the call to religious life is like the whisper of God's voice to Elijah. In our religious life we have a mission that calls us to serve. We are in God's boat with Jesus who takes us where we need to go. Jesus calms the storms of our lives and brings us to him in safety.

We pray today for those who celebrate their jubilees that God will bless them. We ask God for an increase of vocations to the religious life and priesthood to follow in their example.

May those who find themselves in troubled waters allow Jesus to bring them to safety.

May we always remember we are in Jesus' boat so we need not fear.