

God is in Control

Sometimes it is a struggle to live in this world. When we look all around and see the bad stuff happening, we feel downcast and rejected. All around is sin and apostasy. Surely we, like Elijah in our First Reading today, have to wonder, are we the only ones left who trust in the LORD?

Elijah was right to feel downcast - well, almost right. Elijah had done everything that we would expect from a faithful confirmand. The other Israelites, however, did not share his enthusiasm. It seemed that Elijah was the only believer left in Israel.

The God who gave physical strength to Elijah now gave him spiritual strength as well. God invited Elijah to step out of his cave while the Lord, the Saviour-God, showed him three tremendous displays of natural forces - a powerful wind, an earthquake, and a fire.

Would God use that mighty wind, the earthquake, or the fire to send revenge on His enemies? God had done that before. He had used a mighty wind to separate the waters of the Red Sea and had then drowned the Egyptian soldiers when the water came crashing back together. God had sent fire from heaven to destroy the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. But God was not yet about to deal with His people according to the law. Instead God came and spoke to Elijah in *the sound of a quiet whisper* (1 Kings 19:12).

Seven hundred years earlier, God had appeared at Mount Sinai with fire, smoke, and an earthquake. When God had given the Ten Commandments, His voice was like thunder (Exodus 19:18-20). Now God was coming to Elijah not with threats and anger but with patience and love, with gentleness and mercy. Through a quiet voice, God gave spiritual strength to Elijah. Through that same quiet Word, God still today continues to save sinners and to restore the souls of His troubled people.

As a matter of fact, Elijah had not been a failure. The God who sees into our hearts and who "*knows those who are His*" (2 Timothy 2:19) still had seven thousand faithful followers in Israel.

To encourage Elijah, God also gave him a threefold assignment. He was to head north and anoint the next king of Aram, who would be God's scourge on Israel. He was also to anoint a new king over Israel, who would wipe out the dynasty of Ahab and destroy Baal worship in Israel. Finally, Elijah was to anoint the man who would succeed him as prophet. The mission of Elijah was to be continued in Elisha.

The true God - that is, the angel of the Lord who was with Elijah, the Holy Spirit who brings people to faith through the "*sound of a quiet whisper*" of the gospel, and the Father who passed by Elijah on the mountain - has promised that the church of true believers will be in the world until the end of time. The apostle Paul assures us that, despite the vicious efforts of Satan, God will always have his "seven thousand" faithful people in Israel (Romans 11:1-5).

When Elijah asked to die, God did not grant his request. Elijah's death would not come until his work was finished. Then God would give Elijah something much better than the death he had prayed for. God would send a fiery chariot to take him bodily to heaven (2 Kings 2).

God alone will determine when our work on earth is finished. Until that time, He will continue to console us through the “*sound of a quiet whisper*” of His Word and Sacrament.