

LEARNING FROM ELIJAH & PETER ABOUT HOW GOD APPROACHES US

19th Sunday in Ordinary time ~ 9 August 2020



Christ walking on the sea, by Amédée Varint | public domain | edited www.stjosephsbrackenridge

TWO PRAYER INTENTIONS

Before today's homily we have two prayer intentions

- Praying for Beirut and Lebanon
- Praying for people in Victoria and NSW during COVID-19 Pandemic.

HOW GOD RESPONDS TO PRAYER

Then in the homily we shall seek guidance from two biblical passages about how God responds to our prayer.

We gather before the Word of God and reflect on

- 1 KINGS 19:9, 11-13
- MATTHEW 14:22-33

PRAYING FOR BEIRUT AND LEBANON

Pope Francis and the Maronite Bishop in Australia have invited people to pray for the people and nation of Lebanon.

Let us recall some of the present hardship that people are facing there.

In the [7th August United Nations Beirut Port Explosions situation report](#), we learn that

- 'On 4 August, at approximately 18h00 (local time), a warehouse at the Beirut Port containing large quantities of ammonium nitrate exploded. After an initial explosion, a subsequent blast caused widespread damage, with reports of damage more than 20 kilometres from the port area. The explosions and ensuing fires reportedly released toxic materials in the environment.'
- 'More than 157 people were killed, and an estimated 5,000 people were injured in the Beirut Port explosions. More than 150 people remain missing.'

- ‘At least three hospitals and 12 primary health care centres have been severely damaged, rendered partially or fully inoperable.’
- ‘An additional 120 schools, used by 55,000 Lebanese and non-Lebanese children, sustained various levels of damage. Humanitarian partners are conducting further damage assessments, in close coordination with relevant government authorities.’
- ‘On 6 August, a total of 255 new COVID-19 cases were recorded, a new record for Lebanon. The emergency in Beirut has caused many COVID-19 precautionary measures to be relaxed, raising the prospects of even higher transmission rates and a large caseload in the coming weeks.’
- ‘The blasts destroyed an estimated 120,000 metric tonnes of food stocks, including wheat, soy and other staples. Grain silos at the port were also heavily damaged in the explosions. Approximately 85 per cent of the cereals in Lebanon were previously stored at the port. Current estimates suggest that, at regular consumption rates, the remaining grain supply in-country is sufficient for 4-6 weeks.’

PRAYER FOR LEBANON

We pray to you, Jesus
for the people of Beirut and for Lebanon.
We pray for those who have died and those injured,
for the rescue teams searching for people missing,
for the medical teams and emergency workers.

We pray for those repairing and reconstructing
hospitals, health care facilities and schools,
wheat silos and food storage facilities,
accommodation and essential services.

We pray for the Government and for agencies
seeking to feed people over the months ahead.
We pray for the international community
in reaching out to our sisters and brothers in need.

We pray to you, Jesus
for our friends in Lebanon.

[pause and pray]

VICTORIA AND NSW

During the COVID-19 Pandemic,
we pray for the people of Victoria in lockdown
and for the people in hotspot clusters in NSW.

This weekend’s [Catholic Leader](#) publishes an interview with Fr Hien,
the parish priest of [Flemington and Kensington partnered parishes](#) in Melbourne.
From him we gain insights into parish life during COVID-19 in lockdown.
He speaks of the transition in thinking from challenge to opportunity.



FR GERRY HEFFERAN

[printable version at this link](#)

Let us pray for the parishes of Flemington and Kensington.
[pause and pray]

HOMILY – TWO QUESTIONS

1. *Why do we expect dramatic responses from God to our prayers?*
2. *By expecting only dramatic responses from God do we miss what God is really saying to us?*

Let us explore today's 1st Reading and the Gospel.

1 KINGS 19:9, 11-13

Elijah is in trouble. He is afraid.
He is being hunted by an enemy.
He flees for his life to Beersheba,
ventures into the wilderness a day's journey,
and heading further south for forty days to Mount Horeb.

There he learns about the way that God reaches out to him,
not in dramatic strong winds,
or earthquakes, or fire,
but by a gentle breeze,
a breeze so gentle
that the NRSV translates it as in a "sound of sheer silence".

Once Elijah recognizes the gentle approach of God,
he goes to the mouth of the cave and hears a voice saying
"What are you doing here, Elijah?"
In prayer, he tells God his problems.
And God gives him direction for the next part of his mission.

OUR CHURCH DESIGN AND THE GOSPEL

In our parish church, behind the *Table of the Eucharist*
and the *Table of God's Word*,
are louvres shaped in bow form, like the front of a boat.
This reminds us as a community that we travel together on mission.
Above is the sail, reminding us of Holy Spirit prompting us,
being the wind in our sail.
In front is the Cross, the mast of the boat,
reminding us that Jesus leads the way, we follow.

Already in Matthew 8:23-27 we have the instance of Jesus asleep in the boat
while the boat is being swamped by a storm.
They woke Jesus. He challenges them. He calmed the storm.
That passage is a reference to our prayer in the church's design.

ELIJAH | FIRST BOOK OF KINGS 19:9, 11-1



'...the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind came an earthquake. But the Lord was not in the earthquake.

After the earthquake came a fire. But the Lord was not in the fire.

And after the fire there came the sound of a gentle breeze.

And when Elijah heard this, he covered his face with his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave...'

Another Biblical passage highlighting the church design is today's Gospel Matthew 14:22-33.

There are several dimensions to our church design.

The design encourages us in the 'boat' of our community, on a journey, to prayer for people anywhere in the world experiencing great fear.

We call out to God for them and for us.

MATTHEW 14:22-33

Today's Gospel from Matthew could be presented in following four parts.

1. ON THE BOAT JOURNEY

“Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them.”

This time Jesus is not in the boat.

For the Christians for whom Matthew's Gospel is written, the difference between the two Gospel passages would stand out.

In chapter 8, Jesus is physically with them.

In chapter 14, Jesus comes to them, walking on water.

Around 50 years or so after the Resurrection and Ascension, Matthew's community knows that Jesus is there for them.

Matthew's community and our community know that Jesus comes to us.

2. DISCIPLES CRY OUT IN FEAR AND JESUS ANSWERS

“And early in the morning he came walking towards them on the lake. But when the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified, saying, ‘It is a ghost!’ And they cried out in fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them and said, ‘Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.’ “

The initial response of the disciples is fear.

In this celebration of Eucharist, what fears do we recognize within each of us, and how do we call upon God to calm us and reassure us.

Fear of illness, of failure, of pain, of not living up to our expectations, of not living up to the expectations of others, fear of what people think of us, of addiction, of phobias, of death, of not responding well in a crisis, of taking God for granted, of being lukewarm in faith.

In a gentle way, God reaches out to each of us.

3. PETER

*“Peter answered him, ‘Lord, if it is you,
command me to come to you on the water.’*

He said,

‘Come.’

*So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water,
and came towards Jesus.*

*But when he noticed the strong wind,
he became frightened, and beginning to sink,
he cried out, ‘Lord, save me!’*

*Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him,
Saying to him,*

‘You of little faith, why did you doubt?’ “

We pray that we do not put conditions on God’s love for us.

We ponder how Peter must have felt when Jesus said ‘Come’.

We ponder what Peter must have thought when Jesus said ‘Come’.

- Jesus reached immediately
- Jesus didn’t make him levitate in a spectacular way,
but he reached out simply, with strength,
to take his hand and hold him.

We remember times when Jesus took our hand and held us.

Let us pause for a moment and hear Jesus saying to us ‘COME’.

4. TOGETHER THEY WORSHIP JESUS

*“When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshipped
him, saying, ‘Truly you are the Son of God.’ “*

- We worship Jesus in silence,
- in word, in song, in art, in drama and dance, in deed,
- in the Eucharist, in the Sacraments,
- In the Word of God
- In our prayer groups and our liturgies,
- In our individual prayer time,
- In family time, in school time, in our working lives.

In the week ahead, we respond to the invitation of Jesus to ‘come’.

We learn from the experiences of Elijah and Peter.

We open ourselves to whatever way God chooses to hear our prayer.

Let us pray.

Fr Gerry

[Readings: <https://universalis.com/Australia/20200809/mass.htm>]