

**August 13, 2023**  
**Cycle A – 19<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**

1 Kings 19:9a, 11-13a

Psalm 85:9, 10, 11-12, 13-14

Romans 9:1-5

Matthew 14:22-23

**Notes from Bishop Peter**

1. Let's begin with the reading from Saint Paul's Letter to the Romans. He writes about his beloved Jewish people and says, "They are Israelites; theirs is the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the Law, the worship and the promises; theirs are the patriarchs and from them, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen."
  - a. Thus the Jews remain the People of the Covenant, as Pope Saint John Paul II taught. In other words, God never annulled the pledge he made to the Jews to be their God and they his people.
  - b. Also, the words, "Old Testament" don't imply that it is eliminated by the New.
  - c. To help people root out any latent anti-Semitism, John Paul II wrote this prayer during his pilgrimage to Jerusalem and placed it in the Western Wall: "God of our fathers, you chose Abraham and his descendants to bring your Name to the Nations. We are deeply saddened by the behavior of those who, in the course of history have caused these children of yours to suffer, and asking your forgiveness we wish to commit ourselves to genuine brotherhood with the people of the Covenant." (*Sunday, 26 March 2000*)
  - d. In the Gospel, Jesus comes to his Apostles in silence, as did God to the Prophet Elijah in the first reading. They are rowing against a strong wind while their boat is buffeted by the waves. When they see Jesus walking toward them on the water, they are terrified, thinking they were seeing a ghost. Jesus, however, reassures them saying, "Take courage. Don't be afraid. It is I."
  - e. Peter speaks up and says, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you across the water." Jesus calls him and initially Peter is doing fine, quite pleased with himself. But he feels the strong wind and is frightened by the waves and then he makes a big mistake. He takes

his eyes off Jesus and he begins to sink, crying out, “Lord, save me.” Then Jesus, raising Peter up, rebukes him: “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” When Jesus and Peter climb into the boat, the wind subsides and the Apostles adore Jesus saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

## 2. What can we draw from this story?

- a. Jesus invites us to focus on him rather than on our problems and distress. He calls us to adore him as did the Apostles and say the words of Thomas We must pray with Thomas the Apostle, “My Lord and My God.” Then we hear Jesus say, I am with you always, no matter what happens. Trust me.
- b. Next, we can ask the Lord why he doesn’t stop the war in Ukraine or the strife between Israelis and Palestinians or the scourge of human trafficking. I wish I had the answer. In faith, I join you in our mutual belief that Jesus never abandons humanity and will work through human efforts to bring peace and put an end to scourges afflicting us.
- c. The church (the boat or bark of Peter) always will be buffeted by problems from the outside and the inside. For instance, our early Christians suffered persecution as do Christians today. It is a sign of Christ’s presence that so many remain faithful despite their suffering. Some examples of this are Saints Thomas More, Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein) and Franz Jaegerstatter (Austrian farmer who refused to enter Hitler’s army and was decapitated on August 9, 1942).
- d. As we are painfully aware, our church is still suffering the effects of the sex abuse scandal and in most countries, led by our own, has been putting in place safeguards to insure the protection of children, teens and vulnerable adults. This is one of the many crises the church has faced during our 2,000 year history such as persecutions, the French Revolution and the Protestant Reformation. According to the Harvard Business Review, of May, 2002, however, most organizations snap but the Catholic Church always snaps back. It said, “While it’s popular these days to ridicule values, it’s surely no coincidence that the most resilient organization in the world has been the Catholic Church, which has survived wars, corruption, and schism for more than 2,000 years, thanks largely to its immutable set of

values.” And I must add to the active presence of Jesus Christ who promises to be with his church always.

- e. Jesus is with his church as she confronts the evils of our times, taking unpopular stances in the name of the dignity of each and every human being and the solidarity of our race. We oppose abortion, euthanasia and urge world leaders to eliminate the production, testing and even the possession of nuclear weapons, something Pope Francis has called immoral. He said, “It has never been clearer that, for peace to flourish, all people need to lay down the weapons of war, and especially the most powerful and destructive of weapons: nuclear arms that can cripple and destroy whole cities, whole countries. I repeat what I said in Hiroshima last year: ‘The use of atomic energy for purposes of war is immoral, just as the possessing of nuclear weapons is immoral.’] (Address at the Peace Memorial, 24 November 2019).”

- 3. Now we come to our Eucharist. It is Jesus who calls us to faith in himself, the one who suffered horribly and rose from the dead. And it is Jesus who tells us as he told the Apostles, “Have courage. Don’t be afraid. I am with you always.”

***Amen.***