

[Readings: I Kings 19:9a, 11-13a; Psalm 85; Romans 9:1-5; Matt 14:22-23]

Once upon a time, a famous mountain climber began his most challenging task – to journey up the tallest and most dangerous mountain he had ever attempted. The journey took five days of slipping and sliding in sub-zero temperatures, blistering winds and unending blizzards. He could barely see the pinnacle of the mountain. It was within hours of reach. A great smile grew on his face as he began what obviously would be the last leg of his climb.

Getting closer to the summit, his foot slipped on a ledge and propelled him downward. Only his security rope held him still, dangling over the side of the mountain. His first mistake? He attempted the climb alone. No one was near him to save him. His second mistake? He attempted the climb on one of the worst weather days ever. He wasn't a religious man, but in desperation he cried out, "Help me, God!"

A gentle but firm voice was heard through the icy wind. "Do you trust Me?" was the question. "Yes, God, if that is you, I trust you. Help me!" "Cut yourself from the rope." "Is there anyone else up there?" "If you trust Me, cut the rope!" The man refused. His body was found a week later, frozen stiff. And hanging only ten feet above another ledge which would have saved his life.

This story sounds a lot like today's Gospel, doesn't it? The Divine Voice cries out, "Come!" "Cut the rope!" "Trust Me!" But we don't want to cut the rope, do we? We don't want to walk on deep and stormy waters, do we? We don't want to risk the unknown, the uncertain, the unproven. And so we die. We lose.

If we always do what we've always done, we always get what we've always got. We cannot expect God to deliver us from impossible situations if we ourselves are too frightened, too weak or too cowardly to trust Him.

How do we know that God is calling out to us? Do we expect to feel a strong and heavy wind or some rattling earthquake or some bombastic fire to prove God's presence and care for us? If so, then we reduce God to nothing more than a clever magician who can do what used to be called "parlor tricks." Our God is much more grand and glorious than that!

In today's First Reading, Elijah expected God to be revealed in epic proportions. But God is revealed in a "tiny, whispering sound." Elijah was given the grace to comprehend, to understand. And so he hides his face in his cloak as a sign of humility and submission. He stands at the entrance of a cave ready to do what God wants.

Ironically, the Apostles find God in the very "eye of the storm," don't they? In the midst of the chaos of their ship being tossed about offshore. It was "the fourth watch." That means that it was 3:00 in the morning. If you cannot sleep, 3 AM is tossing- and-turning time. If someone isn't home by 3 AM, it's pace-the-floor time. If the telephone rings at 3 AM, it's palm-sweating time. It is the worst of times. It suggests fear and helplessness, worry and regret, loss and despair.

For Benedictine Sister Joan Chittister, it is the best of times. She says that God is found "in the little things that shape our lives. In the contradictions that assail us, in the circumstances that challenge us, in the burdens that wear us down, in the actions that give witness to the values in our heart. God is in the stuff of life." Elijah is running away from his enemies and God asks him, "Why are you taking the easy way out?" Peter begins to sink and Jesus asks, "Where is your trust?" Elijah is sent back to continue his ministry and to pass the mantle onto the shoulders of Elisha to take over. We know what happens with St. Peter.

Look at the drastic lengths St. Paul is willing to go through if only his fellow Jews would have a change of heart and mind and come to the Lord Jesus Christ. He says that he would even be willing to be "cut off from Christ" if it meant the salvation of souls. He would sacrifice his own personal faith if it inspired others.

Maybe you and I, in our noble attempts to bring others to Christ and to the Catholic Church, or to a greater practice of the Catholic faith, feel like we have been "cut off from Christ" as a result of our efforts. In frustration, we might ask, "Lord, how come You are not answering my prayers? Why have my loved ones fallen out of grace and You are not working their way back to You?" This may be the thickest and the strongest rope of all we are still clinging to. "Cut the rope!"

Maybe we will find the answers in the waiting, loving arms of God. AMEN!