

Rev. Toan Do
First Kings 19: 9a, 11-13a
Romans 9: 1-5
Matthew 14: 22-33

NINETEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
EPIPHANY CATHOLIC CHURCH
Louisville KY, USA
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I hope that some of you were curious enough to notice that during the first and second readings and the Psalm, I was reaching out, sitting there, reaching out with one arm for this heavy Roman missile. I have to confess; I don't think I can hold this in one minute. It's rather heavy. The three readings today, as we recall, they all point to something that is so familiar to each and all of us, so often we neglect it and overlook it every day, at least once a day in my own life, namely, to come to God in prayer. In the first reading from the First Book of Kings, the story of Elijah reminds us that after looking at all the different places; the fire, the storms, and other things look or search for the presence of God. Instead, look for major importance in life, example; Elijah tells us or in this Book of Kings it tells us, after all of this and finally after the fire, there was a tiny whispering sound.

It is at that moment of the whispering sound, in the sense Elijah understood or received that as the presence of God appearing to him in a whispering sound. In the second reading from Paul's Letter to the Romans, Paul, starting out in this passage saying, "Brothers and sisters, I speak the truth in Christ. My conscience joins with the Holy Spirit in bearing witness to me that I have great sorrow and constant anguish in my heart." We all know not only in our Catholic tradition, also in the Hebrew and Judaism all the way to our own times, the church has always upheld teaching that the conscience or each person's conscience is the closest means or the bridge that connects us to God. Without searching in our conscience, it is very hard or even more difficult for us to say that we have experienced or encountered the presence of God.

These two stories from First Kings and Romans remind us of the one simple way, very profound to encounter God, often through very tiny, less known, but often so familiar to us. Often, we neglect it, we overcome it. Putting these two stories from Elijah and Paul himself to the gospel today. Jesus teaches us one thing when in doubt or after a major event. For example, last weekend we heard the story that Jesus fed the crowd of 5,000 men, not including women and children. He fed them.

It was about to get dark, and He dismissed His disciples to cross the Sea of Galilee to the other side, also to dismiss the crowds. Now, we know that today we are so familiar with light. Even in the evening when there's no moon, we can still see well driving a car with the high beams on.

Put ourselves 2,000 years ago, back in time, and put ourselves in the presence of complete darkness. That is the moment Jesus reminds us, that is where He is alone and prays to God. The Greek word "proseuchomai" to translate as Jesus praying, here in the context, biblical understanding of praying is that one pours out one's heart into the presence of God. In the same way, similarly, as Elijah was looking for the presence of God in different things. At first, he did not find God, only in the whispering sound is where he encounters the presence of God. Simple, but so profound, like Jesus in total darkness, that we may be scared, that he might be scared too, but it was in that moment he brings back or invites God into the midst of this world, to the presence of darkness. God was there with him, and he was there by himself.

Often, we know especially for young families, I'm now a little bit past that, but just imagine putting ourselves back or taking us back in time to one, two, or three decades ago when we just began to have a family, a career, building up our jobs, good jobs and a good career. In the midst of that, with family, we are so busy. There's no time for even connecting with family, for example, maybe visiting parents and grandparents once a year on Thanksgiving Day or Christmas Day. The rest of the year, we are dedicated to our work, to our family and all the schedules. How often did we, how often did I forget to pray, have God in my life, in our lives? As we know, just a point for reference, those of us who were studying, or in my own case I remember when entering the seminary, I was there as a slow learner, being in formation for 10 years before ordination, from the first year of college, 10 years. By the time we reach our second year in theology, and then the year before the acronym, which is ordained to be a deacon, transitional deacon, each of us were asked to keep and pray the Divine Office, sometimes it is called the Liturgy of the Hours. The Liturgy of the Hours, we can google it just for our own information. We were supposed to spend five hours a day praying. The church believes from ancient time, not only in the Judeo-Christian tradition, but from Jesus' own time until now, praying to God, pouring our hearts and our feeling in the presence of God is so crucial. But how often, not only seminarians but also many priests, particularly, may I add pastors, forget and cannot spend five hours a day to pray.

If you feed me, I will just stay home and pray for five hours. But that is not what the church was looking for. It is an ideal set of time. Often, we fail, but I try, I

make my pledge to keep all of you here in prayer. Before I go into a little bit of a personal story, as I reached out earlier to this book to point out the mark in each mass, we are very familiar with. After the consecration, continuing in Eucharistic prayer there is one section I picked and choose today, the Eucharistic Prayer number two. There's one paragraph in which I found it to be very important and fitting in this context. Remember, God, your church spread throughout the world and bring her to the fullness of charity together with Leo, our Pope, and Shelton, our Bishop, and all the clergy.

In the older translation, there was a line, "and all those whom your Son has gained for you." It is prayer. This is the official prayer of the church. When the priest celebrates this mass or each mass, he is to pray for the whole church, for the Pope, for the local ordinary, the bishop, the clergy, and all of the people in his care. However, when we celebrate this, it has become the official prayer of the church. In each and all of us, prayer. As priests, we make our pledge and promise to pray. We pray the Psalms, of course, there's a reading from scripture before the Our Father. I often set aside a small amount of time to pray for each and everyone, all members of Epiphany, all those who were members of the previous parishes in which I have ministered.

That is a little promise I made to myself and to God, how often I am challenged to neglect that part in life. Today, as we see Jesus being in the middle or in the fourth watch of the night, it is usually from 3:00 to 6:00 AM which is the quietest time of the day. Jesus prays to God by Himself. It is in those moments, as weak as the body might be, Jesus made His pledge to pray and to be connected with God. Paul reminds the Roman Christian that only conscience, through his conscience, that he can communicate with God. Elijah, through the whispering sound in his ears, in his heart, he encounters the presence of God. In the middle of the night, when everything was so dark and quiet, Jesus encounters God. Be once again, reconnected to the living God so that His ministry, as challenging as it will or would be, Jesus was revived and restrengthened to do the work that He was commissioned to do.

This weekend, the three scripture readings bring us back to the one thing that we all can do and are gifted with, namely our desire, or our conscience, or our ears and our heart that is connected to God through conscience, through the whispering sound, and through prayer, pouring out our heart to God. We will encounter His presence in our lives and ask for the strength and the courage not to fall away from God. Let us, once again, bring back this gift that we are endowed, the gift that God

gives to each and all of us, namely through prayer, through conscience, and through listening to the whispering sound of God.