

August 10, 2014 – 19th Sunday of Ordinary Time
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1 Kings: 19: 9-13; Psalm 85:9-14; Romans 9:1-5: Matthew 14:22-33

“Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid.”

For thousands of years people have been forced to pick up what they can carry and move from the life and home they once knew. Leaving all behind they entered into exile – a lost and vulnerable place of no familiar comfort. History books are full of these stories and the stories of scripture about the Judeo-Christian faith journey are full of exile and longing for God’s comfort in the fullness of life. Noah’s ark; Joseph’s family moving to Egypt; the people of Israel wandering in the desert for 40 years; the Babylonian exile; Ruth and Naomi leaving together; the flight of the Holy Family; the disciples trudging to Emmaus and the journeys of the Apostle Paul are but a few.

We hear stories on the daily news about people who have been stripped by unbearable circumstances and who flee from home and immigrate with hope for new life in a safer, greener place. The phenomenon of immigration is growing around the globe. Today, we have the opportunity to explore what is the “more” of these stories. There is more than the natural disasters, than the powerful greed of individuals and corporations and the machinations of governments. There is more than the failed social and monetary systems that lead to violent destruction of the hopes, dreams and legitimate rights of ordinary folk around the world. Their stories seem endless and disturb our peace, shake our faith in God’s promise of life, and rightfully raise, in our hearts, questions about our own role in bringing to fullness the promise of life for all.

We have stories of exile in our own lives and in the lives of people we know down the street, in our workplace and in our communities. We know there must be more to these stories than the faceless charity that stops at our doors; than the unwelcoming fear of the stranger among us; the shunning of those different from ourselves or the competitive spirit that blinds us to another’s need. You and I are tasked with the Gospel call to be God’s love made manifest as the Christ within this phenomenon. You and I are God’s compassion in the flesh and blood world of today even as Jesus showed us the way in his day.

The scripture readings of today speak of the experience of seeking refuge; of feeling exiled far from home; of being tossed by wind and sinking into fear far from the shore. Elijah faces his fear in the awe-full presence of “sheer silence,” hearing God ask, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” In contrast, Jesus calls out to us “It is I,” as though asking, “Do you not recognize me?” and says to us, “Do not be afraid.” The psalmist recalls a deep sense of home describing God’s steadfast love and faithfulness and a time when righteousness and peace spring up from the land. So where is the justice and peace that spring up from the earth? Where is the home of God’s steadfast love? What are we doing here?

Let us note that Pope Francis' special intention for the month of August is REFUGEES – that they “may find a generous welcome and protection of their rights.” The “more” in every story of exile is all the welcoming hearts and strong bonds of community where doors are opened to provide home for the stranger, comfort for the lonely and new life is nourished in those who have experienced so much loss and threat of death. Like Elijah, when we take off our defenses, quiet our fear and are totally attentive, we encounter God in “sheer silence” - the moment of truth, of eye-opening awareness, a moment of yes. When surrounded by noise, turmoil and danger like Peter, we attempt to escape the sinking boat running across tossing waves to reach safe harbor. Can we meet another in the storm, recognize the face of Jesus and extend the hand that will help us both reach safety? Yes, we can and yes, we do! We have seen it happen. We know what we are called to. We are here to grow the edges of compassion into the center of God's promise of justice, peace and fullness of life for all.

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns: Peace, social justice and integrity of creation

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