

Sunday 9 August 2020 Ninth Sunday after Trinity

COLLECT Almighty God, who sent your Holy Spirit to be the life and light of your Church: open our hearts to the riches of your grace, that we may bring forth the fruit of the Spirit in love and joy and peace; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

FIRST READING 1 Kings 19:9-18. When Elijah reached Horeb, the mountain of God, he came to a cave, and spent the night there. Then the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He answered, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away." He said, "Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by." Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He answered, "I have been very zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away." Then the LORD said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael as king over Aram. Also you shall anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel; and you shall anoint Elisha son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah as prophet in your place. Whoever escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu shall kill; and whoever escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha shall kill. Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him."

PSALM 85:8-13 *R Show us your mercy, O Lord, and grant us your salvation.* I will listen to what the Lord God is saying, for he is speaking peace to his faithful people and to those who turn their hearts to him. Truly, his salvation is very near to those who fear him, that his glory may dwell in our land. **R** Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Truth shall spring up from the earth, and righteousness shall look down from heaven. **R** The Lord will indeed grant prosperity, and our land will yield its increase. Righteousness shall go before him, and peace shall be a pathway for his feet. **R**

SECOND READING Romans 10:5-15. Moses writes concerning the righteousness that comes from the law, that "the person who does these things will live by them." But the righteousness that comes from faith says, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) "or 'Who will descend into the abyss?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? "The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. The scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved." But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

GOSPEL Matthew 14:22-33. Immediately after feeding the crowd with the five loaves and two fish, Jesus 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. 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." 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?" When they got into the boat, the wind ceased. And those in the boat worshipped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

POST COMMUNION Holy Father, who gathered us here around the table of your Son to share this meal with the whole household of God: in that new world where you reveal the fullness of your peace, gather people of every race and language to share in the eternal banquet of Jesus Christ our Lord

Sunday Homily 9 AUGUST 2020 9th SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

"You of little faith, why did you doubt?" Matthew 14:31

The eighteenth-century French Jesuit priest Jean-Pierre de Caussade spent the first few years of his ministry teaching at the Jesuit college in Toulouse. In 1714 he stopped teaching, and became an itinerant missionary and preacher.

In the years that followed he developed an extensive ministry of spiritual direction based at the Jesuit retreat house in Nancy, and many of the letters on the life of prayer that he wrote during those years have been preserved for us.

His most famous work, still available today, was a longer piece entitled *Abandonment to Divine Providence*. When writing about the practice of faith in our daily lives, de Caussade had this to say: "God's will desires and can always accomplish what will contribute most to our perfection on condition that we allow God to act. Faith does not doubt this. The more our senses are faithless, revolted, uncertain and in despair, the more surely faith says: 'This is God; all is well.'"

Peter's attempt to walk on the water in Matthew's Gospel follows on immediately from the feeding of the five thousand. Jesus has dismissed the crowds and sent his disciples on ahead of him, across the lake, while he goes up a mountain to pray alone.

Early in the morning the disciples see Jesus walking towards them through the battering waves, and they cry out in fear, thinking they are seeing a ghost. He calls out to reassure them, and Peter responds, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." When Jesus does so, Peter sets out confidently, but he is soon overcome by his fear of the wind and the waves. Jesus catches hold of Peter's outstretched hand, chiding him for his lack of faith. As they get in the boat the wind drops, and the disciples worship Jesus.

This incident is paralleled in Mark's Gospel (Mark 6:45-52), but Mark has one very significant difference: there is no mention of Peter attempting to walk on the water to Jesus. So why does Matthew record this? The usual interpretation of this passage assumes that Peter would not have sunk in the waves if he had only had enough faith, and indeed, Jesus' words would initially seem to suggest this. But the disciples' lack of faith is also implicit in Mark's version of the incident, and has not needed a description of Peter trying to walk on the water to make it so.

The American scholar Eugene Boring has suggested that Jesus' rebuke of Peter relates not to the fact that having more faith would have made walking on the water possible, but rather that Peter was demanding proof of Jesus' presence and power, rather than relying on his faith.

Boring draws a parallel between the form of Peter's words to Jesus, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water", and the words of Satan to Jesus in the wilderness temptations: "If you are the Son of God..." (Matthew 4:3-11).

In the wilderness experience, Jesus is repeatedly tempted to "prove" his divinity to the world and to himself by a spectacular display of signs and wonders. His threefold response to Satan indicates a refusal to be drawn into displays of supernatural pyrotechnics, and instead Jesus focuses

consistently on the God who alone is worthy of trust and worship. By demanding a miracle, Peter has fallen prey to the temptation to seek physical proof for his faith, and he is consequently rebuked by Jesus.

The message of today's Gospel passage challenges our inbuilt human tendency to demand proof for our faith; to ask that God would suspend the natural laws of his creation in order to make belief easier for us. So often we seek, not for faith, but for certainty. We have no problem when all in our lives is going smoothly; but when the "wind and waves" that are the realities of every human life threaten to swamp us – the experiences of loss, sickness and ageing that are our common lot – we find it hard to hold on to faith.

The words of de Caussade with which we began are of real encouragement here. We are urged to hold on in faith, however bleak and unpromising are our circumstances. However strong the winds or overwhelming the waves, God always wills and can do that which is for our greatest good, if only we will let him do so (cf. Romans 8:28). "This is God; all is well."