

## NINETEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

August 9, 2020 Cycle A

**Facilitator:** *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.*

**Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.**

**Opening prayer:** *God of Creation, you make yourself known to us in the gentle breezes and storms of life. You come to reassure us of your saving presence and care for us. Be with us now as we gather to share life and break open your Holy Word. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

**Response to last week's Word:** [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

**Facilitator reads focus statement:** The first and third readings teach us that God's presence in the gentle breezes and storms of life calls us to place our trust in him. In the second reading, Paul shares with us his grief concerning his Jewish brothers and sisters who have rejected the Messiah.

*Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is he wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.*

Read the first reading, the psalm and the second reading, pausing briefly after each one.

### FIRST READING: 1Kings 19:9, 11-13

If we are to read the chapters leading up to today's verses, we will discover that Elijah arrives at the cave, a broken and discouraged man. The wicked queen, Jezebel, has run him out of town. In the verses prior to this reading, Elijah asks God to take his life. In response, God tells Elijah to "stand before the Lord as he passes by." God does not appear in the mighty storm or earthquake, but in a tiny breeze – in the silence. In this experience, Elijah discovers that God is now to be found in the Word that comes as a gentle whisper. Elijah hides his face from God because Mosaic tradition has it that one cannot look upon the face of God and live (Ex 33:18-23). In and through this gentle experience of God's presence, Elijah's faith and hope are restored and he returns to his role as God's prophet.

### RESPONSORIAL PSALM 85

This psalm announces peace and salvation for the faithful remnant of Israel.

### SECOND READING: Romans 9:1-5

These verses are an introduction to Chapters 9, 10 and 11 of Romans, in which Paul deals with the issue of the Jews in God's mystery of salvation. Paul is very proud of his Jewish heritage and, prior to his conversion, saw it as his God-given duty to rid the Israelite faith of Christian heretics. But God opens his

eyes and helps him to see that Judaism is a preparation for the fullness of God's revelation. Paul hopes all Jews would come to this conclusion and open their hearts to Jesus. Unfortunately, this is not happening. The rejection of Christ by his own people breaks Paul's heart. His grief is so deep that he is willing to be separated from Christ if this means that his people will accept Christ. Paul lists seven privileges or blessings that his people have received from God which should open their hearts to see in Christ the fullness of God's revelation. Paul's pain is not unlike the pain of people who become separated from family and friends over issues of faith and religion.

### PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Matt. 14:22-33

*As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.*

**A participant reads the Gospel,  
then all pause to reflect.**

*As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.*

### GOSPEL: Matthew 14:22-33

This story follows directly after the miracles of the loaves and fishes. In that story, we recall that Jesus' effort to go to a quiet place to pray was interrupted by

the crowds. So after his long day of teaching the multitudes, he heads off to the mountain for quiet time.

In the meantime, the disciples get into a boat and head out to sea. But, suddenly, a big storm erupts and they become very frightened. Then without invitation, Jesus comes towards them. At first, they think he is a ghost. Jesus tells them to ‘take courage’ as they confront a big storm.

Peter asks if he can come to Jesus walking on the water, something that takes a lot of courage. As long as Peter keeps his eyes on Jesus, he does well, but once he focuses on the storm, he starts to sink. Jesus comes to Peter’s aid and takes his hand. Our constant challenge, especially in times of fear, is to put our hand in the hand of Jesus. Jesus saves his frightened friend and rebukes him for his ‘little faith.’ Recognizing Jesus’ power over nature, the disciples worship him saying: “*Truly you are the Son of God.*”

Writing his Gospel many decades later, Matthew applies the incident to his congregation. The disciples in the boat represent the infant church. The stormy winds represent the fierce persecution of the early church. While Jesus is not with them physically, he is present spiritually. When all seems lost, Jesus shows up.

The part of the story where Peter walks on water and then sinks could refer to Peter’s lapse of faith during the passion and his restoration by Jesus after the Resurrection. It is also symbolic of how any of us could start out courageously and then falter when the storm or crisis comes our way.

### **FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS**

1. Turn to the person next to you and share what verse or image in the readings caught your attention or drew you in. Was there a verse or aspect of the readings that challenged you?

*The facilitator can decide which is more helpful: to share the next questions with the whole group, or to share in smaller groups of three or four.*

2. In the first reading, God is teaching Elijah that God is to be experienced in the very small events of life. What are some of the small ways you can and do experience our Lord?

3. In the second reading, Paul is heartbroken because his people have rejected Christ. Have you had a similar experience, e.g., when a family member rejected

Christ or the Church? How did that make you feel? How did you handle it?

4. In the Gospel, Jesus’ presence allowed Peter to do something he would never dream of doing. How has Jesus enabled you to do something you otherwise would have been afraid to do?

5. Can you recall one big stormy event where you felt Jesus’ presence?

6. Name one thing today’s Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

### **RESPONDING TO GOD’S WORD**

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week’s readings. Suggestion: Reach out to someone for whom this is a stormy time.

**JOURNALING.** *Having listened to God’s Word and listened to others’ reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as he asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.*

### **PRAYING WITH THE WORD**

**Facilitator:** Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: *Jesus, thank you for always being present in the stormy moments of life. Deepen my faith in this presence.*

### **CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION**

**Facilitator:** What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we need to pray? Pray especially for all who are experiencing a storm in their lives, that they may be able to place their trust in God. Pray for Church leaders and counselors who are expected to bring calm to the storms in people’s lives.

### **CLOSING PRAYER (together)**

*Jesus, just as you beckoned Peter to come to you,  
you invite us to come to you.*

*It is especially lovely when we can come to you  
with our small community of friends.*

*Keep us all close to you and to each other.*

*Amen.*