

## Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A

Dr. Jessie Thomas - Cincinnati, Ohio

**Scriptures:** 1 Kings 19: 9, 11-13; Psalm 85: 9-14; Romans 9: 1-5; Matthew 14: 22-33

### Theme

Our theme today is faith that becomes the center of action and of life. And since faith is not something we just “have” but that needs to be learned and be nurtured in us, let us learn from Jesus, who bids us to come to him.

### Sermon

We recognize the pillars of a nation as those exceptional people who provide its spiritual and moral anchor. They also bestow the nation’s vision and purpose. These are not ordinarily its politicians or rulers. Rather, they are the righteous people, saints, and teachers, ordinary people

of courage, principle and conscience, people who realize the truth within themselves and are willing to take responsibility for their community.

Rarely are they recognized and honored in their lifetime; sometimes they are tolerated as goads and troublemakers and only appreciated after their death; most often they are unsung, anonymous people who, because they are sincere and conscientious, suffer in a world of vanities. These are people who have a deep realization of truth and are called to serve as society’s internal leaders. Their example and message has a transforming effect on those who approach them with humility and deference. It is often of far greater value than the policies and speeches of the governing authority. What they have in common is faith.

In today’s first reading from the book of Kings Elijah makes a physical trip to Mount Sinai because he finds himself in crisis. He has lost his faith and wants to terminate both his prophetic ministry and his life, but in an act of sheer grace God intervenes providing him with life giving food and water. God suggested that he take a pilgrimage to Mount Sinai, the place that was the source and essence of Israelite faith. Today’s story calls out to God’s people who may feel that hope is lost and suggests a way forward. It calls to God’s people who are to be the hope for others that have become worn-out, fearful, or in need of renewal to return to their faith, to eat and drink of God’s life-giving sustenance, and listen for God’s voice. Listen carefully to God’s voice it is the way to find new energy, new vision, and a new sense of purpose.

It seems that in the days of this twenty-first century like Elijah many Christians find themselves in a crisis where faith in God’s plan no longer exists. Perhaps some of us are unaware of God’s plan. Each day the media portrays a world that appears to be more concerned about those who have rather than those who do not have. Tax cuts for the wealthy but no income for the unemployed many of whom lost their jobs as a result of companies seeking cheaper labor elsewhere. Racism, defined as the hatred of one person by another -- or the belief that another person is less than human -- because of skin color, language, customs, place of birth or any factor that supposedly reveals the basic nature of that person continues to plague our world. It has influenced wars, slavery, the formation of nations, and legal codes.

It continues to perpetuate greed and wars which wreak lives of innocent people caught up in the excessive desire for wealth and possessions. Foreclosures increase and poverty adds more names to its roll.

My brothers and sisters, the question before us today might very well be, "Where is our faith in God." "Where is our faith in God's plan?" "Have we become alienated from the message of love?" Perhaps like Elijah we too need to take a trip to the mountaintop to pray and rejuvenate ourselves in a way that we will be able to trust in our faith.

Recently I was asked by a local church to speak to a gathering of people who were studying the "Just Faith" program on the topic of "How Racism Affected My Life." During that encounter I made this statement, "We are all children of God, and therefore we are brothers and sisters in Christ." "We are called to love one another, and sometimes that may require a change of heart and a stepping out on faith." A young man who was participating in the group raised his hand and asked the following question, "How do I change my heart, and what does it mean to step out on faith?"

In today's Gospel we are reminded by Peter that even though we profess our faith as Christians we may find ourselves lost in the storm and afraid to step out on faith. Stepping out on faith calls for us to do things out of the ordinary. It calls for us to recognize each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. It calls for us to love one another as Christ loves and cares for us. It calls us to prayer and trust in an Almighty God that can do all things.

That day, Peter had faith in God as he began to walk across the water, but when the storms came he became frightened and no longer trusted, so he began to sink. Jesus stretched out his hand and caught him, and said to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" When the wind died down those in the boat gave homage to him, saying, "Truly, you are the Son of God." Through Peter's action others in the boat that day came to realize that Jesus was indeed the Son of God.

Through our faith and actions we are called to be a beacon of light for others. Joan Delaplaine O.P. , in a sermon , And the Greatest of These is Hope, once said, "If every frightened, paralyzed follower of Christ, hiding in their upper rooms, were to open themselves to the gift of grace and hope, given by the Spirit, might we see a transformation of this country's values before it's too late?"<sup>1</sup>

As a child my pillar of hope was my grandmother Annie Gay. Through her I witnessed the gift of grace and the meaning of having faith and hope in her songs and words. When she became distressed about situations of the world and it seemed as if her faith was fading, she could be heard singing, "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound." And she often could be heard proclaiming as she went about her daily work, "All things are possible through Christ who strengthens us." Even though as an African American woman loss of faith might have been real for her due to the many injustices of her time which left its mark throughout society, she always knew her father in heaven. Through her song and through her prayers she taught us that while injustice was prevalent, hope and change is possible because, "All things are possible through Christ who strengthens us.

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<sup>1</sup> Joan Delaplaine And the Greatest of These is Hope, Message by Joan Delaplaine, n. 24, 24 February 2002, available from [http://www.cses.org/csec/sermon/delaplaine\\_4608.htm](http://www.cses.org/csec/sermon/delaplaine_4608.htm); Internet; accessed 6 March 2008.

As we continue to live in a society that appears to lose faith for various reasons we might look first to the cross where Jesus died for us and for our sins; we might also look to the example of others who we recognize as pillars of faith like Elijah chosen by God to be a prophet, but lost faith, like Peter who walked the water, but lost faith and like my grandmother Annie, who always reminded me that even when faith is lost “All things are possible through Christ who strengthens us.”

Amen.