

+ Maria

Brothers and Sisters in Christ and Our Lady of Mt. Carmel –

We have had a very full day here at St. Teresa's Motherhouse, Avila-On-The-Hudson, sharing the hospitality of the Carmelite Sisters for the Aged and Infirm as well as the leadership of the Blue Army. Thank you, Mother Mark and Sisters as well as all of the Motherhouse staff, for such a warm welcome and for all the behind the scenes work you have done to prepare for and run this day in which we are honoring Mary, under the title of Our Lady of Fatima during this centenary year of the apparitions. We are grateful to Americo, the President of the International Blue Army and to the members and leaders of the Blue Army that help keep the message and lessons of Fatima before the eyes of believers, so that we can drink deeply of Mary's love, inspiration and direction. It is a treasured part of the Fatima events that Mary appeared dressed as Our Lady of Mt. Carmel. In all humility, we Carmelites take pride in the fact that Mary has never appeared in the habit of any other religious Order, at least as far as I know. The scapular, the rosary, prayer, penance, Gospel living – all of these elements work hand in hand, enabling a believer to chart a sure course in the following of Jesus Christ.

Now we come to the most important moment of this day – and we know it. We are celebrating the Eucharist on the first day of the week which Jesus Himself consecrated by His resurrection from the dead. We Catholics are never confused. Jesus is the center of our faith. Mary, our Mother, always leads us to Him. Her virtues are His virtues. Jesus was the object, if you will, of Mary's faith, hope and love – and it must be the same for us. As I've sometimes chided the Sisters here, even if we don't feel we have done any good thing, or successfully completed any one thing in a day, if we have attended Mass, heard the Word of God and united ourselves to the Lord in Holy Communion, our day has been a complete success, useful, valuable, life-giving, and of service. By God's grace, everything else will get done, because we have met the Lord. From the very pages of the Acts of the Apostles, we know that from the beginning of the Church Mary was there in the midst of the apostles and disciples, united with them in prayer, receiving the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and living the new reality that is the Church, the living body of Christ in the world. Mary remains always the Mother of Christ and the Mother of the Church and our Mother, and we take comfort in this as alone and unaided, without heavenly help and Mary's maternal protection, where would any of us be?

On this 19th Sunday in Ordinary Time, the ears of all Carmelites are tweaked as we hear the reading about Elijah taken from the First Book of Kings, Chapter 19. We consider Elijah to be our spiritual father and leader. In many ways, he's a kind of mirror of the journey of the soul to God. He can be bold, fearless, brave and prophetic. He can be fearful, dejected, depressed and want to run away. He can talk and brag, and be speechless and dependent. He can be deeply human and profoundly spiritual. He is Our Father Elijah. What sets him apart though? Oh yes, he was chosen by God. But I happen to believe that many people are chosen but lack the faith or courage to accept their election. The outstanding characteristic of Elijah was, however, that he was all for God, and his mission was to bring the wandering Israelites back to God. His very name means: "Yahweh is God". During his journey, God rewards Elijah with a very special experience of His presence – not in strong winds, not in an earthquake, and not in fire – all theatrical displays of great power. No, God reveals Himself to Elijah in a tiny silent breeze, a tiny whispering sound. The Prophet possessed a kind of contemplative soul, though, that had learned to recognize, or discern God's presence and not get lost in wind, fire and earthquake. We Carmelites seek that same tiny whispering sound of God's presence and aim to discern or recognize it in the noise of our world and life. We Catholics must also seek that silent moment, when we can know that God is all for us and all present. Mary found it and many gospel texts tell us that she simply saw, heard and meditated quietly upon God's presence and actions in her heart. The great saints find that moment, and we are offered that moment many times – the moment that banishes fear and inflames faith, but don't always recognize it.

St. Peter, again like Elijah, a deeply human yet deeply spiritual man, also gets his moment. St. Peter's virtues and vices are made clear to us in the gospels. Bold and brash yet weak and fearful even to the point of denying knowing Christ, Peter's heart is not unlike Elijah's – he was all for God and all for Christ. When he had his great theatrical moment "walking on water" he couldn't do it, it wasn't the right way. It wasn't God's way of revealing himself, but Peter's, so he sunk. Like Elijah, Peter's faith also had to be purified and tested, until in the end, like the Prophet, he became unto death on an inverted cross, the rock of faith and rock of the Church.

In the beautiful little *Magnificat* there is a marvelous meditation for today's readings drawn from Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI. It is beautiful, entitled "The Storm and Our Faith". Read it, if you have the book and are so inclined. But just using the title helps us to summarize the Word of God for today, as well as an understanding of the Fatima

Message. None of us gets to live a life without storms. It is even a funny reality that if you read the gospels – including today’s passage – several times we see Jesus not rescuing his disciples from storms, but in fact sending them out into storms. Storms are not just on the sea. They can be anywhere: in the city, at work, within our family, in our parish, in our government, or worst of all, the storm can be inside of us. Faith in Christ is not an insurance policy against storms, but a promise of help, grace and loving mercy in the midst of storms. Elijah had his storms: King Ahab and Queen Jezebel wanted him dead. Elijah had to deal with idolatry, as we also must navigate the idolatries of today, or even of our own making. Countless were the conflicts that Elijah got into – but God was with him, offering him the silence of consolation, or the consolation of silence which meant God’s presence and, if God is for us, “who can be against us” as St. Paul states so powerfully. St. Peter had his storms, the Church which is the bark of Peter, certainly has her storms – but, always, there is Christ, ready to calm the storm as He sees fits in His Divine way. The message may seem like “not enough” or not “strong enough” but by heavenly wisdom, it is always enough.

We can look at the time of the Fatima apparitions as well – terrible times near the end of the bloodiest war in human history and at the beginning of the bloodiest century in human history. These were times of storms which, alas, have not all passed. Many false prophets and fake systems seem to take over, but prove empty and destructive with a terrible price for humanity. The message of prayer, and penance, and devotion, and consecration to the Immaculate Heart of Mary can seem “not strong enough” or “not enough” but they are, because ultimately Christ and Mary’s Immaculate Heart will triumph. As people of faith, we must listen for and rely on the quiet moments of affirmation and presence that remind us that the storms and drama of our world are not ultimate, not the end. God is with us, and only God is ultimate, and we must cling, with Mary, to the good Lord in faith: praying and giving witness to Jesus, the one and only savior of our world.

Father Mario Esposito, O.Carm.
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