

## Nineteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time: The Tiny Whispering Sound

I love the mountains. They fascinate me. I look at them, and I just want to say, "Good job, God." There are times that I feel that the power and strength of a mountain represents God watching over His world. Elijah went to a mountain to look for God. The particular mountain he went to was the mountain of the Lord, Horeb. This mountain was also called Mt. Sinai. Remember how Sinai was presented in the Book of Exodus:

*Exodus 19:18*

*And Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and the smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain quaked greatly.*

and

*Exodus 24:17*

*Now the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel."*

It was on Mt. Sinai, Mt. Horeb, that Moses received the Ten Commandments, written, as *Exodus* says, with the finger of God. Elijah had been told by a voice to go "and present yourself on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord will be passing by." Elijah went and waited for the awe inspiring presence of God. As he must have expected there was a huge wind that threw boulders around like pebbles. But Elijah, the prophet of supreme faith, did not sense the presence of the Lord in the wind. Then there was an earthquake. But Elijah's faith told him that the Lord was not in the earthquake. Fire followed, perhaps started by lava flowing through the fissures caused by the earthquake, perhaps due to volcanic activity. We all know how powerful a raging fire is. But Elijah's faith told him that the Lord was not in the fire. Then there was a tiny whispering sound. That voice was the voice of the Lord. It was more powerful than wind, earthquake or fire. That voice was the voice of faith.

Sometimes we look for the Lord with pre-conceived notions of how He should appear. We expect to find God in a powerful manifestation of His presence. Sometimes we are so concerned with finding Him in a mighty display of natural events that we miss His presence in the tiny whispering voice of faith. We seek the Lord in powerful miracles, and we miss hearing His voice in our children, our family or our church community. We have to stop determining how God should be and simply be open to His presence wherever He is, in others and even in ourselves. We have to let God be God: mysterious, loving, present in more ways than we could ever understand.

We have all heard people say, "I come to Church, but I get nothing out of it." Maybe we have all said that at times, or at least felt that way. Well, if we have received the Eucharist, then we have received infinitely more than we could know or appreciate. But people might say, "I know that, but I still often leave Mass feeling an

emptiness.” The problem is that we are deciding how God should be present during the Mass instead of opening ourselves to the many ways that He is manifesting Himself. Maybe we are looking for feelings of spiritual satisfaction. But, perhaps, today God might not be in the fire--or in warm fuzzies. Maybe we are seeking an answer to one of our problems. But, perhaps, today the Lord might not be in the earthquake--or in instant solutions to our difficulties. Maybe we are looking for a new insight into our lives, but perhaps today the Lord may not be in the wind--He might not be breaking the boulders of our self-perception. But the Lord is still there. He is always with us. We might not know where, but He is there. For there is a small voice that says He is the reason for everything around us in Church and in our world, from the crucifix over the altar, to the Word of God proclaimed, to the Eucharist we share, to the blessing we ask for over our food, to the morning prayers and evening prayers we say and the bedtime prayers with the children, to the wonders of every person God has ever created, to the beauty of his babies, to the marvels of nature. Everything radiates the Presence of God. He is within each of us, loving us as individuals and uniting us into the community of love. If we come to Mass and claim we are not getting anything out of it, if we go through life claiming that we cannot find God, it is because we are looking for God where we expect Him to be, not where He is.

How is it that Elijah heard the tiny whispering sound in the middle of the roar of the wind, the crashing of rocks, the earthquake, the fire? He settled himself down; he suppressed his own expectations, and he let God speak to Him as God chose to speak to Him.

There is noise around us. We are so accustomed to it that we don't even notice it. We may be living near a busy road, but we tend to tune out the traffic. I taught high school for three years in East Boston, right on the final approach to Logan Airport. We were all used to the jets. We just tuned them out. We tend to tune out the external noise, but we don't make as much of an effort to tune out the internal noise. We let our thoughts ramble in prayer. We let our minds fly attempting to solve a problem. We need to quiet ourselves down. We need to free ourselves for quiet time. We need to make a prayer space in our homes or in our rooms, a space where we can just focus in on God. This is more than freedom from external noise. We need to allow ourselves to experience the internal quiet and peace that comes from being in the Presence of God.

That is the simple message of today's first reading. God is present for each of us. He speaks to each of us. We just need to do a better job listening to Him.