

St. Joseph's Parish, Ottawa, ON.

August 8 & 9 2020 Reflection – St Joe's – 19th Sunday in Ordinary Time

1 Kings 19, 9:11-13 God was in the silence, not the great wind, earthquake, fire

PS 85 The Word of God brings peace, steadfast love and faithfulness

Rom 9:1-5 The Israelites were to manifest God into the world; they were to be a theophany. Christ came to the world through them. Christ can manifest God's glory in new and powerful ways.

Mt 14:22-33 Jesus is a theophany, a manifestation of God. We are called to walk with God like Peter walked with Jesus. We are called to manifest God in our world.

Thank you for joining me as we reflect on the readings for this 19th Sunday in Ordinary Time. My name is Donna Rietschlin and I am a member of St Joseph's parish in Ottawa and a member of the Reflector's Ministry at St Joe's. I have the privilege of being with you and sharing some of my reflections about this Sunday's readings.

Before we begin, let us acknowledge and pray for the needs of many people in Beirut at this time. There was a huge explosion in the harbour area of the city last Tuesday. Many people have died and many more are suffering terribly. Let us begin with a few moments of silence to honor and pray for all those impacted by this event. Thank you.

All our readings this weekend have something in common. Each one reveals the presence of God: a theophany. In 1 Kings, Elijah is aware of God in the sheer silence, not the great wind, the earthquake, or the fire. In Romans 9, Paul is filled with grief because his brother and sister Israelites who were to manifest God to the world by the way they lived, had refused to welcome Christ, who came to all of us through them. And in Mt 14, Jesus is God with us, and we are called to walk with God like Peter who was welcomed to walk with Jesus on the water, a seemingly impossible task.

These many instances are theophanies; a time or event when God was manifest in our world. I am sure you can think of many other Bible readings that are similar.

What strikes me is how God is present in each of these readings and how many did not experience God. I got to thinking how this is true in my life and how a friend of mine lives it so very differently. (In the story that follows I have changed the names and a few other details to protect my friend's privacy.)

I think Theresa sees and experiences God regularly in her everyday life. She does not need mountaintop experiences to know God is with her. She has become a woman of compassion and prayer as she has grown into herself, the person God calls her to be.

Theresa is a woman who cannot speak. She uses modified signs and gestures and sounds to communicate. She is so aware of the goodness that is in her life. Just this past week we were on a Zoom call together and she remembered an old friend that was part of her life for 4 or 5 years while the friend was a student at the University of Ottawa. We spoke about this friend, Janet, and Theresa reminded me that after finishing university Janet moved to Australia. They kept in touch with letters

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and cards. Janet had a rough time in Australia and began to drink heavily. Theresa knew Janet was unhappy but did not know that she was finding solace in alcohol. Theresa kept praying for Janet and a few years later, Janet moved back to Canada. A few years later still, Janet was able to quit drinking. Theresa never judged her friend. She just loved her and sent cards. Most recently, Janet was able to help Theresa accomplish one of her goals. She helped Theresa raise some funds for an organization Theresa loves. Janet has a good job now and has become a City councillor in the town where she was born. She told me that she always felt Theresa's love and support no matter where she was living or how she was living. Theresa told me that she has always loved and prayed for Janet and continues to pray for her every day.

To me, this is God manifest in the world. These two women are almost 40 years apart in age, they have quite different family stories, they have vastly different educations and different work experiences, they live in different cities. One of them does not speak verbally and one of them almost never stops speaking. And, they have simply loved one another and been friends for 20 years. Their friendship is a good example of God being manifest in our world. Love and fidelity through time and space speak of God's love and fidelity.

During this time of pandemic and physically distancing, do you have experiences of God being manifest in your life? I sometimes look for the big events to find God. But like Elijah in 1 Kings, right now it seems God is very evident in daily, very ordinary experiences. We may know of people offering to help neighbors get groceries. We see nurses, orderlies, cleaning personnel, chaplains, and doctors going to work every day to care for the sick. We see store clerks in the malls and shops working to ensure folks can purchase things they need. We see the folks delivering things some of us order online. We may know some support workers aiding folks with disabilities. We see cashiers at the grocery store. The list goes on – regular people helping others in so many ways.

In this time of uncertainty and difficulty, God is with us. Sometimes we may feel overwhelmed by it all and not be aware of God's presence. That is OK. God is still there. God knows us and loves us.

I remember when I was an adolescent, probably about 16 years old; I was talking with my friend Eileen's mom. I told her I was not sure I believed in God. I had never said this out loud before. Mrs. McGrath did not act surprised or even take much time to respond. She said, "That's OK, dear. God believes in you."

Mrs. McGrath gave me a great gift that day. It was not up to me!! God was in my life even when I was not aware of God's presence. Many times since, Mrs. McGrath's words have been a light in the darkness.

Dr. Victor Frankl, an Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist, a Holocaust survivor and author of *Man's Search for Meaning* said, "When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves".

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These times are tough. Many of us suffer. We do not know when things will change and what the 'new normal' will look like. The uncertainty we live today is extremely difficult. We have limited ability to change things.

As today's readings remind us, we have the certainty that God is with us in all the day-to-day circumstances of our lives. This is a cause for hope.

I would like to end our time together with a quote about hope from Henri Nouwen. He said, "Hope is willing to leave unanswered questions unanswered and unknown futures unknown. Hope makes you see God's guiding hand not only in the gentle and pleasant moments but also in the shadows of disappointment and darkness."

Blessings and good health for today and the days to come. May you find hope as you live these days and know that God is always with you.

God loves you.

Donna Rietschlin

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