

Fr. Jeff's Weekly Homily

**19th Sunday in Ordinary Time
August 10th, 2008**

READING 1: 1 Kings 19:9a, 11-13a

Elijah went into a cave to take shelter.

Psalm 85

Lord, let us see your kindness and grant us your salvation.

READING 2: Romans 9:1-5

For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people

GOSPEL: Matthew 14:22-33

Peter got out of the boat and began to walk toward Jesus on the water.

As we hear these three readings on this week, I realize that God is much easier on us than we are on ourselves.

Elijah, in our first reading is on the run. He had recently proven the God of the Hebrew people more powerful than the local pagan gods and afterward had all the pagan priests killed. He was afraid the local pagans were chasing him and believed he was too important for God to allow to be caught.

Paul is speaking to the Romans who were suffering from the peer pressure of their pagan families and friends when they chose to be Christian. Paul was identifying with them because he had suffered peer pressure from his Jewish family and friends when he became Christian.

Finally, Peter stepped out of the boat and walked on the water of the stormy sea. Now, honestly, every time I read this old favorite I approach it differently. I try to see how it resonates with what I think is going on in our lives.

Today, I am thinking we are tougher on ourselves than God is.

When we are children, we begin to see and hear stories about heroes. We wear Superman or Spiderman or Wonder woman costumes. Our imaginations are wide open and we believe we can be the real deal, the superhero. We adults know the child's true

identity and we encourage them lovingly.

This week, one of our older teenagers died of a head injury from a tragic accident. I have known him since he was six years old and I am especially fond of him. To give you a hint about his personality: he had the same name as me and when I was growing up, the only time I was called “Jeffrey” was when I was in trouble. Jeff’s whole family called him Jeffrey most of the time! He was so smart, so talented; about a thousand people came to his funeral. So, this year, I have been thinking about today’s readings and I have a theory.

I think we start believing we really are superheroes when we are little children. But when we are teenagers, although we know better, we still believe we are superheroes. I think teenagers resent and rebel against anything or anyone who suggests we are merely human or that we suffer with human limitations. I even think teenagers are ashamed that they do not have super powers because they have internalized the expectation from their childhood.

But, my friends, it doesn’t end. We who are older and have experienced some of life’s hard knocks, and think we really ought to have given up the fantasies about being superheroes, never give them up. We strangely believe we really should be able to walk on water. We believe we should be able to fix whatever is wrong in our families, we believe we ought to be able to conform the world to our expectations, we believe everything should work and we can make everyone safe and happy and we are ashamed of not being better and more powerful than we are.

Elijah thought he was irreplaceable but God let him know Elisha was about to replace him. Peer pressure has always tried to pull Christians away from Christianity. And this year, I am reading about Peter and thinking, he stepped out of the boat believing in his own power, not Jesus’ power. That’s why he sank.

That’s how we are tougher on ourselves than God is. Like a parent knows and loves the child playing Superhero, God knows us and loves us as we are. God doesn’t ask us to be God; why do we put so much pressure on ourselves? There is no reason to be ashamed, take the hand of Jesus and get in the boat. It is the way to live life large, it is the way to live life happy, it is the only way the ever-lasting good news!

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