

# ***HABETE FIDUCIAM EGO SUM***

*A Homily for the Nineteenth Sunday of the Year (A).*

*St. Paul's Parish, Gävle.*

*Texts: 1 Kings 19,9a. 11-13a; Ps. 84; Rom. 9: 1-5; Matt 14: 22-33.*

***”Courage! It is I! Do not be afraid.”*** My dear brothers and sisters, the message that the Lord has for us today is a very important one. It is a message that addresses one of the most important problems that we face again and again: the problem of fear.

In the First Reading we are presented with the story of the Prophet Elijah. Elijah was a faithful prophet of Yahweh. He did not waver even during the oppressive reign of King Ahab and his wife Jezebel. The height of his courage and fidelity was his encounter with the prophets of Baal – a false god whose worship was introduced and promoted in Israel by Jezebel. But after his victory over these false prophets, Jezebel, who was notoriously heartless, threatened his life. It was at this moment of real danger to his life that Elijah experienced the powerful but gentle saving presence of Yahweh.

The experience of Elijah is similar to that of the disciples as we read in the Gospel of today. They were in the boat on their way to the other side of the lake, while Jesus stayed behind to pray. But far out on the lake they began to experience serious danger: a head wind blew against their boat. But precisely at this moment, when they thought that all hope was lost, Jesus came walking to them on the lake. They did not immediately recognise him. Indeed they thought that the figure they saw was a ghost.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, these two stories are meant to bring hope and consolation to our lives. We notice that Elijah who was already frightened and who was therefore in hiding had to experience a strong wind, an earthquake and a fire. Obviously these must have aggravated his fear. But then the presence of the Lord came to him with the gentle breeze. While the disciples thought that there was no more hope, there came the Lord of lords.

Let us remember that the name that the Prophet Isaiah said the Lord would be given at his birth was Immanuel – God with us. At the moment his disciples faced life-threatening danger, there was Immanuel. In the same way, whenever we face danger of any type, there is Immanuel and his real presence restores our hope. In the face of all the raging storms of our lives, he comes walking towards us.

What the disciples saw was not a ghost. It was their Lord. At times we still harbour some doubt especially if it seems that the strong winds of this life persist even after hours at prayers. We are not alone. Peter felt exactly the same way. As a way of quick discernment, he asked the Figure walking on the lake for a proof. “Lord if it is you, tell me to come to you across the water”. The Lord said to him, “Come”. And sure enough, he began to walk on the strength of the power of Immanuel. But Peter felt the force of the wind, and shifted the focus from the God-with-us to himself and began to sink.

Right now as I speak to you, there are many among us who are experiencing the force of the storm against their boats. We are besieged by worries and assailed by doubts. We spend hours at prayers and there seems to be no response from the Lord who thought us to ask and expect to receive, to seek and expect to find, to knock and expect the door to be opened. The message that the Lord has for us today, therefore is that right at the moment when we feel that he is far away from us, when the strong winds threaten our marriage, our career, our future, he is right

there with us. Even when we exercise our faith in prayer and walk towards on him, we should focus on him and not on ourselves.

And if our true experience is that we are really sinking, what are we supposed to do? We should do what Peter did. We should cry to him, "Lord save me!"

We must not forget that the Lord is with us always, whether we feel his presence or not. His true and real presence is not measured by our feeling. It is guaranteed by his promise. And we all know that he is faithful. That he cannot deceive us.

So, what shall we do about our fears? Right here in this Church, the Lord Jesus is truly and really present among us in his words, which are being proclaimed. He is truly and really present among us in our hearts as members of His Body through our baptism. And he is truly, really and substantially present among us in the Holy Eucharist, which we celebrate.

And he addresses us as one family and also as individuals. His words of power do not change: "*Courage! It is I! Do not be afraid.*"

*Thank you, Lord for this message.*

*May words of my mouth*

*And the meditation of my heart*

*Find favour in your sight. Amen.*

*Damian O. Eze, MSP*

*Gävle, Sweden.*

*10 August 2008.*