

August 10 -- 19th Sunday in Ordinary Time
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First Kings 19: 9, 11-13	Elijah heard the voice of the Lord, not in the wind, in the earthquake, nor in the fire, but in the gentle breeze.
Psalms 85:9, 10, 11-12, 13-14	“Near indeed is salvation for the loyal;... Love and truth will meet; justice and peace will kiss. Truth will spring from the earth; justice will look down from heaven.”
Romans 9:1-5	Paul speaks of his grief over the unbelief of his own people.
Matthew 14:22-33	Jesus sends the disciples in a boat to the other side, while he stays to pray. He later joins them by walking on the water. Jesus tells them to “take courage, do not be afraid.”

During Mass, a young person left the chapel several times, while talking on a cell phone. Since he is a member of the police force, I figured something bad is going on. Later he explained that his commander was just shot in an ambush, in broad daylight, and some of his friends who were accompanying him were also shot. This is just one more chapter in the reality of the control drug traffickers have over our city of Ciudad Juárez. The demand for drugs, mainly cocaine, marijuana, and heroin, by people in the U.S., along with the ruthless ambition of drug dealers from throughout the world, has been a cause of death, suffering and insecurity in the border towns along the Mexican-U.S. border. The people live in fear, are stressed, and try to cope with this situation.

All of us experience fear and stress in our lives and look for peace and security. In the U.S., our personal security has become a major concern. We build fences and walls to protect ourselves, pass strict laws we feel will keep us safe. The Gospel today sets two themes that run throughout today’s readings: the call to mission and the need for contemplation. These themes call into question our way of looking for security.

“Then he made the disciples get into the boat and precede him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds.”

“After doing so, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When it was evening he was there alone.”

This phrase, “Jesus makes the disciples get into the boat and precede him to the other side” is a symbol of the call to mission, to go the other side, where it is uncomfortable, dangerous, and at the same time, life-giving.

I have been living in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, for the last 10 years. “The other side,” here, means the U.S. Almost all of the families have friends or relatives living in the U.S. Many have had experience living in the U.S., as migrants (immigrants). Some of the experiences were very good, while others were not so good.

- In one of the first masses I celebrated in Ciudad Juárez, a woman prayed for her brother, who went over to the “other side,” and has not been heard from since.
- When Carmen’s mother was dying, her brother, who is living and working in the U.S. without documents, returned to Mexico to accompany his mother. He was very helpful in assuring his mother that God loved her and that she was going to heaven. Carmen said that she did not have the same faith and confidence to speak to her mother in this way. When the brother returned to the U.S., he gave his Bible and some pictures to one of the religious sisters, and asked her to send them to him in a couple of weeks; he did not want to risk losing them during his attempt to cross the border.
- Pilar, who is very active in the community, was deported from the U.S. for not having all of her documentation in order. She was chained and put on a plane and taken to the border.

We as missionaries share a lot of similarities with migrants. We are never completely at home, at peace. We get things mixed up, “*enredado*” as they say in Chile. We share their anxieties and fears.

Isabel Parra, a singer/song writer from Chile, who found it necessary to go into exile, during the military regime of Augusto Pinochet, writes in her song, “*Grito Serás del Continente* (Cry of the continent)”:

Digo que exilio es estar solo
Sin tener nada, darlo todo
Por la distancia tan marcada
Dejar el alma en un rincón.
Hablar de amor sin corazón
Usar la fe y la esperanza
Sin impaciencia dar confianza
Con alegría aunque la espera
Sea una eterna enredadera.

*I say that exile is to be alone
Without having anything, giving it all
By the distance so marked
To leave the soul in a corner
To speak of love without a heart
To use faith and hope
Without impatience to give trust
With joy even though in the waiting,
Life, is an eternal complicated web*

“The waiting, Life, is an eternal complicated web.”

There are books that explain the grammar and syntax of a new language, but it is impossible to find a book that is going to explain the experience and culture of every town and people. This has to be learned through living with them, sharing with them, dying and rising with them.

One difference with the migrants is that we as missionaries choose to get in the boat and go the other side. There are times, though, when people are “put on the boat,” “sent out” almost against our will. We end up on the other side of fence.

Following the voice of God, the prophet Elijah ends up alone and in danger, fearing for his life, feeling depressed and overwhelmed. The Apostle Paul also expresses his anxiety in regards to his separation from his Jewish roots and traditions.

I speak the truth in Christ, I do not lie; my conscience joins with the Holy Spirit in bearing me witness that I have great sorrow and constant anguish in my heart.

For I could wish that I myself were accursed and separated from Christ for the sake of my brothers, my kin according to the flesh.

They are Israelites; theirs the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; theirs the patriarchs, and from them, according to the flesh, is the Messiah. God who is over all be blessed forever. Amen.

Fear is a common element of the life of a missionary. While working in Chile, during the military regime and national security state of Pinochet, I did not comprehend the importance and power of fear. During a violent protest in Santiago, Chile, I was asked by a priest from one of the neighboring parishes to accompany his parish, while he was visiting his homeland, in Spain. He was concerned because there was a protest planned by the national unions. During the night, the people began to protest, and I could see fires, buses of armed police, shouting and shooting. In the middle of the night, a group of people came to the parish to ask me to accompany them to the police station, because a young woman had been arrested. I will admit that I was tempted to say, “no,” “no way,” but went with the group of people. When we neared the heavily guarded police station, there were only two of us, the young woman’s brother and me. Out of the dark, we heard the voice of a policeman, ordering us to stop. The police asked me to wait there, while the brother was able to enter the station and talk with the official in charge. The next morning, the young woman was let go, with other people detained that night. This was a relief since it was still

possible to have people detained, tortured and even made to disappear. When a person was arrested, it was important to act fast, find out where they are and ask for the person's well being.

Fear is an important part of life, and has to be taken into consideration. In prayer and in community, we can discern what to do. It is important to recognize the fear, but not let fear paralyze us and keep us from action or mission.

While the apostles were getting on the boat, Jesus is going off to be alone, going off to pray. There seems to be a contradiction between mission and contemplation, but you cannot do one without the other. This time alone was necessary for Jesus in order to continue with his mission "to the other side."

When Jesus returned to the boat, walking on the water, the disciples were terrified and cried out in fear. At once, Jesus spoke to them: "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid."

The prophet Elijah finds this out. He does not find God in the hurricane, in the earthquake, in the storm, but in the gentle breeze. God walks with him, shows him the way.

St. Paul has the security of following the Spirit, of having integrity, although he does feel anxiety. Paul reminds us, in First Corinthians 5, 1: "For we know that if our earthly dwelling, a tent, should be destroyed, we have a building from God, a dwelling not made with hands, eternal in heaven."

God is walking with us, today:

"Near indeed is his salvation to those who fear him, glory dwelling in our land."

"Kindness and truth shall meet; justice and peace shall kiss ... Justice shall walk before him, and salvation, along the way of his steps." Psalm 85

For more information

Our Catholic social tradition encourages us to live in global solidarity. Read more in "Loving our neighbor in a shrinking world," a resource developed by Maryknoll missionaries who witness the global impact of U.S. political and economic decisions. Through this resource, Maryknoll missionaries encourage voters in the 2008 elections to scrutinize candidates' policy proposals through the lens of those who, both in the U.S. and overseas, lack basic necessities, endure the source of racism, live with gender-based discrimination or feel the immediate impact of climate change.

Email for a copy, or find the election guide here:
www.maryknollogc.org/2008elections/index.htm

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