

14. June 2024

The Prophet Elijah and the Holy Spirit

1 Kigs 19:9a,11-16

At that time, Elijah came to a cave, and lodged there. And the Lord said to him, "Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord." And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. And when Eli'jah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him, and said, "What are you doing here, Eli'jah?" He said, "I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the people of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thy altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away." And the Lord said to him, "Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, you shall anoint Haz'ael to be king over Syria; and Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint to be king over Israel; and Eli'sha the son of Shaphat of A'bel-meho'lah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place.

The prophet Elijah is a very important biblical figure who remains relevant to this day. To this day, believing Jews wait for the prophet Elijah, believing that he will return to Jerusalem on a Sabbath and precede the coming of the Messiah.

We Christians, enlightened by faith, know that the Messiah has already come. The mission of the prophet Elijah to prepare the way for Him was fulfilled by St John the Baptist (cf. Mt 17:12), who in fact preceded the Lord and announced His coming (cf. Mt 3:3). The prophet Elijah, however, is still present in the consciousness of the scripture-orientated people, since he is present at the transfiguration of the Lord and speaks to Him with Moses (cf. Mt 17:3). Moreover, Elijah is often associated with one of the two witnesses described in chapter 11 of the Book of Revelation, which would indicate that he would come in the End Times, before the Return of Christ, to bear public witness.

All this is reason enough to reflect on this figure whom the Byzantine liturgy honours as "the most holy Elijah", to whom many chapels and churches are dedicated, and whom the Carmelites regard as their "spiritual father" and model.

In today's reading we see the prophet Elijah gaining a deeper knowledge of God. He was called by the Lord to come out of his cave to receive his next mission. Elijah then waited for the Lord and knew that He did not reveal Himself to him in those strong natural and therefore sensual experiences, but in a "still small voice".

Here we have a biblical example of the Holy Spirit's gentle manifestation, in the prophet Elijah, who was truly a fighter (*"I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts"*). Before giving him other missions, the Lord calls him to this profound experience of His presence.

This seems to be a basic pattern when we are called to serve the Lord fully. Before we act and are sent, it is necessary to listen to God. It is usually a very delicate listening, because it is the voice of the Holy Spirit that bypasses the noise and draws us into silence to speak to our heart and mind.

Let us keep three points from today's meditation:

1) A deeper knowledge of God usually comes in silence. Even if our outward life is full of activities and commitments, we should zealously guard the times when we can be alone with God. When you love someone with that special spousal love, you enjoy being alone with him or her. On God's side, this is even stronger when the soul has a spousal relationship with Him. God and the soul like to dialogue in silence, deepening their love.

2) The Holy Spirit, who is the love between the Father and the Son, usually comes to us very gently, even very tenderly..... This presence of His is hardly perceived amidst the hustle and bustle of this world, but it is there. As we grow in the spiritual life, the Holy Spirit refines and deepens His way of communicating with us, leading us to live more and more according to God's will.

3) To a soul prepared in this encounter and exchange with God, He can give His instructions and entrust His missions. We have become ready to listen, and then the

power of the Holy Spirit will enable us to fulfil the mission. This mission will not always be the crowning of a king and the anointing of a prophet, as was the case with Elijah, but we must learn to discover and fulfil the mission of each day and of our whole life.