

FIRST READING: 1 Kings 18:41-46

A reading from the first Book of Kings:

Elijah said to Ahab, "Go up, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain." So Ahab went up to eat and drink, while Elijah climbed to the top of Carmel, crouched down to the earth, and put his head between his knees. "Climb up and look out to sea," he directed his servant, who went up and looked, but reported, "There is nothing." Seven times he said, "Go, look again!" And the seventh time the youth reported, "There is a cloud as small as a man's hand rising from the sea." Elijah said, "Go and say to Ahab, 'Harness up and leave the mountain before the rain stops you.'" In a trice the sky grew dark with clouds and wind, and a heavy rain fell. Ahab mounted his chariot and made for Jezreel. But the hand of the LORD was on Elijah, who girded up his clothing and ran before Ahab as far as the approaches to Jezreel.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: PSALM 65:10, 11, 12-13

It is right to praise you in Zion, O God.

You have visited the land and watered it; greatly have you enriched it. God's watercourses are filled; you have prepared the grain.

It is right to praise you in Zion, O God.

Thus have you prepared the land: drenching its furrows, breaking up its clods, Softening it with showers, blessing its yield.

It is right to praise you in Zion, O God.

You have crowned the year with your bounty, and your paths overflow with a rich harvest; The untilled meadows overflow with it, and rejoicing clothes the hills.

It is right to praise you in Zion, O God.

Gospel: Matthew 5:20-26

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew:

Jesus said to his disciples: "I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter into the Kingdom of heaven. "You have heard that it was said to your ancestors, *You shall not kill; and whoever kills will be liable to judgment.* But I say to you, whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment, and whoever says to his brother, 'Raqa,' will be answerable to the Sanhedrin, and whoever says, 'You fool,' will be liable to fiery Gehenna. Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there at the altar, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Settle with your opponent quickly while on the way to court with him. Otherwise your opponent will hand you over to the judge, and the judge will hand you over to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. Amen, I say to you, you will not be released until you have paid the last penny."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection for the 10th Thursday of the Year

The three year drought in the land is the result of a serious conflict in Israel. Who is the supreme and true God of God's people? Is it YHWH or Baal? Of course we know the answer and most of the victims of the drought knew it too. It is God! Elijah is God's prophet and spokesman. Ahab and Jezebel, his wife and queen, represent the idol Baal. Baal was a fertility idol whom the devotees of the idol believed was responsible for the fertility of the land and fecundity of human and animal life. The priests of Baal were unable to invoke the idol's power to end the drought. Today's reading has shown that it is in fact God, YHWH who's truly God who is the power, creator and source of all life. God has brought the rain and ensured that Elijah was first to Jezreel.

This is a story of the primacy of God above all. It's told as a battle between Elijah and Ahab. Their wills are clear and definite. Both protagonists view each other as "the troubler of Israel." We, from our perspective of faith, can intuit the outcome of the conflict. Elijah, through the power and providence of God, will win, but at a deep price. Please look up and read chapters 18 and 19 of 1 Kings. This is a powerful saga of Elijah's courage and the toll it took on him. God wished to rid Israel of the evil of worshipping idols. God sought to be the only God of Israel and that Israel be God's people; exclusively.

God wants to be our God like that too. We can know God as we gather and in the breaking of bread. God can be the source of our strength as we face challenges, pain, loss and COVID. God is for us a thought away and will speak in all our experiences. When we slip up, and all of us do, God will forgive our sins and heal our pain in compassion, mercy and love. For that's who God is; infinite, eternal and unconditional love. Friday's reading shows how that happened for Elijah and reading the entire story tells us why Elijah needed it. It's nasty.

What is someone's personal righteousness? Usually, if you're at all like me, it has a precursor word, "self." Only God is righteous. One can only be righteous while living in God. Jesus did that for his entire life and he was righteous because of his unfair advantage over us. He is God! Jesus looked at the commandments and has told us to approach them in the love of God. Not our love for God but in God's love for each of us. Jesus' stern admonition for us is not to judge. Jesus is our judge and unlike me, he is infinite, eternal and unconditional love. He can forgive always. I cannot. To make a judgment on another is to take Jesus' place and in doing so I fall into the sin of Ahab; idolatry. When I judge, I make myself an idol.

It's always easy for me to sit back and sound so wise while I write these reflections. It's another thing to live in a world like ours. Quoting Paul of sinners, I am foremost as is every other member of the human race. I drive, I stand in line and I interact with people who annoy. There are those whom I can't stand. I thank God that God will forgive me when I fail in these situations. I'm glad that God is the only God and not me. I'd wind up condemning me to hell. Better to entrust my soul and the souls of fellow sinners into God's loving embrace. There we can all know the One, True God.

May God guide our thoughts of others back to God.

James D. Beath
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