

12. June 2020

“The prophet Elijah and the Holy Spirit”

1. Kgs 19,9.11-16

There he went into a cave and spent the night there. Then the word of Yahweh came to him saying, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' Then he was told, 'Go out and stand on the mountain before Yahweh.' For at that moment Yahweh was going by. A mighty hurricane split the mountains and shattered the rocks before Yahweh. But Yahweh was not in the hurricane. And after the hurricane, an earthquake. But Yahweh was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake, fire. But Yahweh was not in the fire. And after the fire, a light murmuring sound. And when Elijah heard this, he covered his face with his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then a voice came to him, which said, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' He replied, 'I am full of jealous zeal for Yahweh, God Sabaoth, because the Israelites have abandoned your covenant, have torn down your altars and put your prophets to the sword. I am the only one left and now they want to kill me.' 'Go,' Yahweh said, 'go back by the same way to the desert of Damascus. You must go and anoint Hazael as king of Aram. You must anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king of Israel, and anoint Elisha son of Shaphat, of Abel-Meholah, as prophet to succeed you.

St. Elijah the prophet is a very formative biblical figure who continues to be influential to this day. Even today, believing Jews wait for the appearance of the prophet Elijah, who is expected in Jerusalem on a Sabbath and who is to precede the coming of the Messiah.

Now we Christians - enlightened by faith - know that the Messiah has already come. The task of the prophet Elijah has been fulfilled by St. John the Baptist (*cf. Mt 17,12*), who indeed immediately preceded the Lord and announced his coming (*cf. Mt 3,3*). But the prophet Elijah still remains in the consciousness of the biblically oriented people, for he appeared with Moses on Tabor and spoke with Jesus (*cf. Mt 17,3*). Also the two witnesses who are mentioned in chapter 11 of the Revelation of John are not seldomly connected with the prophet Elijah, who would come at the end of the times before the return of the Lord to give public testimony.

All of this is reason enough to take a look at the figure of the holy prophet Elijah, to whom many chapels and churches are also consecrated and who is regarded by the Carmelites as their religious father and model.

Two days ago we heard that through him God called his people to decide to return to him and to abandon idolatry. This happened in a rather dramatic act, which testified unmistakably who the true God is.

Today we experience how Elijah gains a deeper knowledge of God. He was called by the Lord to come out of his cave to receive his next commission. Elijah now waited for the Lord and made the experience that God did not communicate Himself to him in a strong natural and therefore sensual experience, but in a gentle, quiet whisper. I recall the meditations in preparation for the feast of Pentecost and my indications of how the Holy Spirit usually (as a gentle soul guest) acts on the soul of man. Here we see a biblical example in the case of Elijah, who was quite militant (*"I am full of jealous zeal for Yahweh, God Sabaoth"*) Before entrusting him with further tasks, the Lord first calls into this intimate experience of his presence.

This has the features of a basic pattern, when we are called completely into the service of the Lord. Before acting and being sent, it is necessary to listen to God. It is usually a very fine listening, namely to the voice of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit withdraws from the noise and entices us into silence to speak to our heart and spirit.

Let us take three points from today's reflection.

1. A deeper knowledge of God usually happens in silence. Even if our outer life is marked by many activities and obligations, we must jealously watch over the times when we can be alone with God. In the little Father booklet of Madre Eugenia, which I often mention, God the Father speaks at one point about what a great joy it is for him when a soul is alone with him. This is related to love. When one loves a person in a special spousal way, one enjoys being alone with him. This is even more the case with God when our soul is in a spousal relationship with God. God and the soul love to exchange in silence, even to deepen their love.
2. The Holy Spirit, who is the love between Father and Son, usually comes to us very gently, even with great tenderness. One hardly notices his presence in the hustle and bustle of this world, and yet he is very present. As the spiritual life

grows, the Holy Spirit refines and deepens his communications and leads us more and more into unity with God's will.

3. To a soul prepared in this way, God can give his instructions and commissions. We have become ready to listen and the power of the Holy Spirit will enable us to fulfill the mission. This does not always have to be the anointing of kings and the calling of a prophet as with Elijah, but it is always about recognizing and fulfilling the mission of the day and of our life!