

# Sermon

◆ **First Reading:** *1 Kings 19:9, 11-13*

◆ **Second Reading:** *Romans 9:1-5*

◆ **Gospel:** *Matthew 14:22-33*

**AFTER SENDING THE CROWDS AWAY JESUS WENT UP INTO THE HILLS BY HIMSELF TO PRAY ;**

How often do you and I head off “to the hills” to pray and be alone?

Says you “...stop the world, I want to get off...”, what’s stopping you?

multiple distractions, never ending chores, commitments, constant e mails that need my immediate attention, do they really?, THEN TO STOP AND PRAY!!

Way back in December 1982, brother Otte, a member of my religious missionary congregation invited me to join him on a trip to the Choco area of West Colombia, south America. Colombia was my 1<sup>st</sup> mission appointment as a newly ordained priest, some of our missionaries had already opened a mission on the banks of the Atrato river, the surrounding area is a natural dense rainforest ; this undisturbed area, at that time, extended on and on ; matter of fact Colombia, being such a huge country, still has areas that have not been explored. During my 10 day visit to the mission brother Otte had warned me “if you are going for a walk, don’t go too far”, I think he was referring to danger from snakes or from getting lost or both, I didn’t bother asking, it was around 8p.m. Anyway being adventurous and always loving to take a risk, off I went for a walk, deep into an undisturbed world of natural beauty, THE JUNGLE! What a beautiful experience, the pulsating natural sounds were just amazing, sounds I’d never before heard in my life, there were many sounds and all in a type of harmony impossible to describe, it was the cool time of the day, also I heard another lovely sound coming from a nearby tributary, the flowing water was crystal clear, tasty to drink ; I just stood there, and I remember saying to myself “THIS PLACE MAY AS WELL BE A CORNER OF HEAVEN, MY ONLY BUSINESS HERE IS TO BEHOLD AND ENJOY”

Afterwards I returned to the city of Bogota to start into my new appointment as assistant priest ; To this day I still think of the best 30 minutes of my life, enjoying that powerful beauty in a non-explored area of God's creation, deep into the rainforest of West Colombia, it was I believe, a God given 30 minute spiritual gift, never to be forgotten, or in the context of to-day's Gospel reading, I had been "to-the-hills" ; IF you read the 1<sup>st</sup> reading, the prophet Elijah enjoys his experience of God, not in a rainforest, but in a cave on Mount Horeb, it's a great reading **AND AFTER THE FIRE THERE CAME THE SOUND OF A GENTLE BREEZE ; WHEN ELIJAH HEARD THIS, HE COVERED HIS FACE WITH HIS CLOAK AND WENT OUT AND STOOD AT THE ENTRANCE TO THE CAVE ;**

Seemingly to enter into prayer with mother nature close-by makes a great mixture, the further you go "up the mountain" or to "higher hills" the easier it is to discover the presence of God, behold the silence and the smallness of our lives.

In our present Pandemic situation, are you finding it difficult to pray with or without nature close by? are you burdened with worry about your health?, your job?, your mortgage?, your family?, will there be enough food on the table?, Yes!, we are in troublesome times and to experience the presence of God seems "distant", but it doesn't have to be. When Our Lord went "up into the hills by himself to pray", no

doubt he would never have said to the Heavenly Father "Please I pray, make things easy for me so that I don't have to be rejected and laughed at , also would it be possible to get a new set of apostles?, the ones I chose are half-witted and couldn't even understand the parable of the sower!!!!!! " "

more so the lord would have pleaded "Heavenly Father, walk with me, strengthen me as I move forward in my public ministry, some want to do away with me, help me to face them with patience and friendliness, bless my few disciples and open their minds to the Message of Life..." ; after coming down from his time "in the hills" Jesus had to return to the harsh realities of life.

Just like ourselves during this Pandemic, each of us is affected in our own personal way, some are more anxious than others, but we have to stick to that precious time “to-go-up-into-the-hills” and be alone with the Lord in prayer ; In the present circumstances we need our spiritual strength to move forward in order to face and deal with so much uncertainty ; it’s not a time to question whether the Lord is still with us or not, of course He is with us as He promised ; No! I also don’t have a magic solution to these troubled times, but I know the Lord listens to the broken hearted and wants to heal a broken world,

So don’t give up on your Faith and the power of prayer ; the response to the psalm is very much in line with this reflection

**LET US SEE, O LORD YOUR MERCY AND GIVE US YOUR SAVING HELP**

while the 1<sup>st</sup> verse of the same psalm is equally encouraging

**I WILL HEAR WHAT THE LORD GOD HAS TO SAY, A VOICE THAT SPEAKS OF PEACE. HIS HELP IS NEAR FOR THOSE WHO FEAR HIM AND HIS GLORY WILL DWELL IN OUR LAND**

.....stay healthy, God bless for now

*Fr Kieran A. Fitzharris SVD*