

FR HUGH'S HOMILY FOR 19th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

In the first reading, Elijah is on the run from Jezebel after killing 400 of her prophets, and as we know Jezebel's wrath was not to be ignored. He runs. He is terrified, and he is told to hide in the mountains. Who knows what will happen to him? Will God help him, or has his time as a prophet come to an end? So, he lives in hiding living off very little.

In the gospel again the disciples are terrified, for a shorter while admittedly, but they know the lake and they know they could meet their death there if the wind keeps up. In both of these there is both a very real and physical threat to life, but also a very real feeling that God may have deserted them.

It is not often perhaps that we experience this today, and perhaps when terrified we don't directly blame God or ask for his help. But there are times when we pray whatever we believe.

On Scafell many years ago, two of us were climbing and I went up the wrong side of a scree. Wainwright said take the right, but I decided that the left was better! My friend had made it to the top, but I found myself slowly sliding down, weighed down by my backpack, which I was about to discard, and very much certain that the drop below would kill me. The cloud was down and it was very cold, we were both very tired by this time, my friend was trying to lower his tent down to me but I could not reach it. I had my face pressed into the earth and more than a few prayers were said. Suddenly out of the cloud at the top three guys appeared and knowing what they were doing got me up and onto the top in safety. My friend said: They were three angels.

Physical or mental threats are there in our lives and we feel deserted.

In my story and in our two stories today help arrived. In the two bible stories it is God, in my story it appeared to us at the time to be messengers of God.

But God comes in very different ways. Elijah, against all that seems most sensible, is told to stop running. The disciples see a ghost and are terrified. In each what happens is the most unexpected. For Elijah it is nothing dramatic or impressive to his surprise, for the disciples, to their amazement, which is quite reasonable, it is Jesus walking on water. But so extraordinary it is that from relief and love and faith Peter himself starts to walk on water until his very human fears take over and he begins to sink. For me it was salvation out of the clouds.

In each of the stories a hand appears (in a whisper for Elijah) to pull us out of our desperation and pull us to safety. 'Why did you doubt?'

I am sure that God is always present in our lives, but we need to place our trust in him now. Believe that he is here and that he will reach out to us even if in God's time not ours, which can be frustrating.

Like St. Paul for his fellow Jews where his love for them and his desire to save them is so great, God loves us deeply and his desire to save us is infinite.