Fr. Gary’s Homily Notes
Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
August 13, 2023

I remember it as if it was yesterday: the night of my ordination to priesthood. I remember lying prostrate, face-down on the floor of St. Raphael Cathedral, as the Rite of Ordination calls for, while the Litany of Saints was being sung. The list of Saints is long, but it wasn’t long enough that night. I remember thinking, “I’m not sure I’m ready for this. If I had only a little more time, then I’d be absolutely sure. Aren’t there any more saints to call upon?!” But the singing ended; it was time. Almost forty years has passed, but some things never change, because there is still doubt and fear in my life. Doubt that I am not up for what God is calling me to do as a priest, fear that I might fail you and the people of St. Peter as we transition into one parish. But over these 40 years, I have come to know doubt and fear, not as something to deny or avoid, but as a gift, the windows to deepen my faith.

Doubt and fear. We treat them as unwelcomed intruders to our peace of mind and heart; we curse them and are shamed by them. We cast them into the basket of negative feelings. But I’m sure that is not where they belong. I am confident that God uses them to bring us into deeper faith.

God did that very thing with Elijah the prophet. Elijah was sent, as all prophets are, to do God’s work. And he did. And it got him into a whole lot of trouble. Now he has a whole cast of very angry people following him into the desert. (You really need to read the first 18 Chapters of the Book of Kings to get the whole picture but suffice to say that he was not in a good place.) He was afraid for his life, and he was beginning to doubt God and God’s intentions. Why would God, who had called him to be prophet, allow him to get into this mess? But it was there, through that window of fear and doubt as he hid in the cave, that God reassured him. Not in the wind or the earthquake or the fire, but in a tiny whispering sound, God assured him: I am here. Elijah hid his face and came out of the cave; he knew again that God had not abandoned him.

And then there is Peter. Spontaneous and presumptuous as he always was, at Jesus’ invitation he began to walk across the water in the midst of the storm, waves still tossing the boat he had left behind. Then, he started to think, which always seemed to get him into trouble. Fear sets in with the wind. Doubt raises its head from the wave. He begins to sink. And in this window of opportunity, in this window of fear and doubt, Jesus reaches out for him. “Oh you of little faith” becomes, not a condemnation of Peter, but the window for faith to emerge. “Truly, you are the Son of God.”

Fear and doubt...

...when couples stand before God, their family and friends to pledge their vows...when our once secure system of democracy seems ever so fragile...when an 18-year old heads off to college for the first time...when our bodies begin to reveal the truth of our mortality...when the once-secure relationship all of a sudden seems so fragile...when our parish is asked to transition into something it has never been...when climate changes and economy teeters and loved ones die...when we hit mile-18 of a that 26.2 mile marathon...

...perhaps at those moments we can find our doubt and fear not so much as unwelcomed intruders of our peacefulness but welcomed guests from which faith—deeper faith—renewed faith—can emerge.