

We express our deep gratitude to Mathew Antony – Secretary, Commission for Evangelisation (COFE), Bernadette Morris - Programme Manager (COFE), Archdiocese of Delhi, for preparing the Recollection Papers for our Congregation. May God bless their ministry.

Reflection for October 2020

Theme: Prophets- The ‘Active’ Life Elijah

A Reflection on 1 Kings 18

Seth Joshua, a Welsh Presbyterian minister and Evangelist was a forerunner of the 1904-1905 Welsh Revival which began as a movement of prayer. For years he had been praying that God would raise up a young man from the pits to revive the churches. There was nothing spectacular about these meetings except a simple prayer that Joshua prayed “O God bend us”. So moved was a young boy by this simple prayer that he went forward and prayed with agony- “O God bend me”

This young boy was none other than Evan Roberts, the man responsible for the Welsh Revival becoming national news and for hundreds of thousands of people joining the faith.

Amidst these new beginnings, in the November 9, 1904, edition of a London newspaper, The Life of Faith, a writer named Jessie Penn-Lewis reported on a remarkable work just beginning in Wales under the ministry of men like Evan Roberts and Seth Joshua. And this is what she reported: a cloud no bigger than a man’s hand had arisen in Wales- a perfect description of the small yet clear beginning of what would soon become a mighty work.

We continue our journey with the stalwarts of the Old Testament as we look at the second aspect of Elijah’s life- the active life of Elijah. As our spiritual father rebuilt the altar at Carmel, we believe that he will guide us as we, together, try to rebuild our lives at Carmel.

“present yourself” (1 Kings 18:2)

Earlier God had told Elijah to hide himself, (1Kings 17:2) but now He asks him “to present” himself. There is a time to hide and be alone with God and there is also a time to present ourselves before the world. Perhaps it is something like Jesus asking us to be both salt and light. The salt gives flavour when it is *hidden* in the food it is mixed with, but the light can *never* be hidden. And perhaps Jesus intentionally places the salt before the light- we must first learn to do his will in the hidden, unseen life, before we truly do his will in the light!

However, sometimes being hidden is “safe”- there are no risks involved. Sometimes we can convince ourselves that being hidden is our calling as Religious sisters or perhaps it is the sole duty of the Superior to be the ‘light’? By nature, do we tend to prefer the “hidden” aspect of our apostolate even when our elders and companions are expecting more from us?

“And Ahab had called Obadiah, who was in charge of his house” (v3-4)

Before we see the dramatic meeting between Elijah and Ahab, there is an interesting line that says so much. Obadiah was a man of God. Interestingly, the house of the evil king Ahab was under the care of a godly man Obadiah. This line gives us great hope that God has his people even in the most unlikely of places, and nothing is too far from His reach. Interestingly, the house of Ahab or in other

words the royal household was once under the authority of God but it had been handed over to someone else now!

Perhaps it is good to ask ourselves from time to time- who is in charge of me at the moment?

“who eat at Jezebel’s table” (v 19)

Jezebel was not content with having a private temple to pray in nor would she be pleased with her husband’s support towards her ‘gods’. Her purpose was to dethrone the God of Israel. The real intent of evil is always this. A complete control over us. Evil will never be satisfied with a little freedom over a small area. To us it looks like a small vice, one small habit, a little white lie, and perhaps we convince ourselves that “this is how I am”, but beneath the surface it takes root and destroys us from the inside. Like St. Teresa would say, “As for venial sins, I paid little attention; and that is what destroyed me.” This is what happened to Israel.

What are those habits within us which we, without realizing, are feeding and letting grow?

“How long will you falter between two opinions?” (v 20)

There comes a time in our life when we have to consciously make a sincere decision to choose Jesus. And that one choice is made up of by a myriad of smaller choices that we make every day. Or as Danish philosopher and theologian Søren Kierkegaard more aptly puts it- the “purity of heart is to will the one thing”.

The one thing that the pandemic has done is to remind us that we live complicated lives with too many options, too many “things to do”, while our restless hearts flutter from one thing to the other. In that sense, the pandemic has taught us the need to slow down and have lesser “things to do” but to do them with sincerity. Henri Nouwen once described his own struggles in choosing: “I want to be a great saint, but I also want to experience all the sensations that sinners have.” And if we be honest at some level that is true for all of us.

What are some of those “smaller choices” we can make today so as to help us choose and will the One thing with more sincerity?

“And the God who sends down fire, he is God” (v 24)

It was thought that Baal was the sky-god, lord of the weather and the sender of lightning (thought to be fire from the sky). If Baal were real, he certainly could send fire from heaven. Incidentally both the miraculous acts that Elijah does- first no rain, and then fire from heaven, both were to do with sky! Ironically, the sky god couldn’t do anything.

To put God and himself on the line took a lot of faith. It was not some kind of stunt. Elijah had learned to trust God in his hidden life, over the many months of daily dependence on God, both at the Brook Cherith and at the widow’s house at Zarapeth.

It is important that we start trusting God and learn to depend on him with our daily seemingly insignificant things.

Which contractor should I give the job to? Can this person be trusted? Who shall I send to do this course? Will helping this person at this time be the right thing to do?

Sadly, often more than not, we rely on our judgment more than we do on God. It starts with a simple step of actually asking Him- Lord, what should I do? And then making the decision that brings peace to our heart. Of course this is easier said than done. We may make mistakes along the way. But God is patient and so should we be. There is a lesser chance of getting it right if we never ask than if we do!

“Come near to me” (v 30)

While this was Elijah speaking, remember he was only the mouth piece of God. This was in all truth, God’s cry too, it is poignant. God wanted his people to come near to him. The famine in that sense is not so much a judgement, as a need for the people to realize they are turning their backs on what God wants the most, intimacy. *Could this pandemic be seen likewise in the same light?*

In calling the people near to him, he is also wanting their full attention. At this point, the people are watching as if it is a spectacle and they are an audience. Whichever party wins, they sway there; salute the rising sun. There is no loyalty to anyone in that sense. By calling the people near, Elijah is also making them more than just onlookers. Now they are witnesses! Also, if there really is going to be a fire, the closer you are the more the chances of being singed, of the fire engulfing you too!

A familiar story from the desert fathers: Abba Lot came to Abba Joseph and said: Father, according as I am able, I keep my little rule, and my little fast, my prayer, meditation and contemplative silence; and, according as I am able, I strive to cleanse my heart of thoughts: now what more should I do? The elder rose up in reply and stretched out his hands to heaven, and his fingers became like ten lamps of fire. He said: Why not become fire?

Have we felt God’s call to come near to him? Have we kept a safe distance from God out of fear of being singed or being engulfed by this fire that can make us fire?

“And he repaired the altar of the LORD that was broken down.” (v 30)

This is perhaps the most important act that Elijah was doing. There was once an altar of the Lord at Carmel, which needed to be built before the sacrifice was made. Elijah is repairing something that once stood strong and unshakable, unbreakable- much like the faith of the people at one point. Now their faith had been broken and needed to be built again.

Are there some aspects of our faith that we have allowed to be broken or shaken? In times of sicknesses do we believe in the possibility of a miraculous cure? Have we limited our abilities based on what our experiences in school or college have been? What aspect of our faith- whether as an individual or as a community, do we need to build again?

“Then the fire of the Lord fell” (v 38)

The action of this fire much like the fire on the day of Pentecost was downward- from heaven to the earth unlike earthly fire that rises from the earth to heaven. Elijah’s plea was less energetic and lasted less than a minute but it was the plea that was answered because it was to the only God who exists- and who can answer!

When the fire of the Lord fell, it not only consumed the burnt sacrifice but the wood and the stones and the dust, and it licked up the water that was in the trench! It would have sufficed if simply the sacrifice was on fire, but God takes all we offer Him... Also He wanted to come in all his glory that the people may know who is God and so the fire is not just enough to satisfy their curiosity and assuage their doubts- but large enough to even instil a holy fear. And it is at this point that the people “fell to their faces”. It is a fall of repentance, a fall of shame as well as a fall of worship.

Have you ever had an overwhelming experience of God’s glory that has made you realize that you are in the presence of the living God?

“there is the sound of abundance of rain.” (v 41)

There were no clouds at this point. No lightning or thunder and certainly no sound audible to the human ear! But the prophet’s ear is inclined to listen to so much more... He *heard* the sound because he *knew* that with the downfall of Baal and his prophets, rain was only inevitable.

“He bowed down on the ground, and put his face between his knees.” (v 42)

It seems like such an odd posture to pray- but Elijah hides his face, his very identity, making himself a nobody before the One he worships. It is because he can go down on his knees and ‘hide himself’ that he had the ability to stand tall among a group of vultures who were waiting for him to falter and fail. It is because he had humbled himself before Yahweh that he was raised by Yahweh before the king, so that his prophet might speak truth to power!

Have there been moments in your life when you have had to deal with politicians, lawyers, doctors or people who assumed you were just a woman, only a praying nun and you knew you had to make your voice heard- where did you get your strength from?

Or perhaps you feel you have not had the courage to stand up for what was right even when you knew what was expected of you? How do you think you can grow in courage?

Much like Seth Joshua and Evan Roberts who prayed incessantly- “O God bend us”, “O God bend me”, perhaps we too need to supple ourselves, and bend ourselves like Elijah did, not so much in posture, as in our will, that we receive the grace to see the cloud approaching.

“There is a cloud, as small as a man’s hand, rising out of the sea” (v 44)

Elijah knew this was the will of God, yet he prayed fervently for it to come about! And it was his fervent prayer that brought the rain! Sometimes we know the will of God and we expect it to come about any time now.... But we don’t see it! Could it be that we haven’t prayed as fervently as we ought to?

At some level, we all believe that the pandemic will come to an end someday. And true enough, we perhaps started praying with gusto, joining in with all the people around the world- but has our prayer been consistent enough? Sometimes it is easy to hide in anonymity when we know the whole world is responsible! But perhaps the whole world doesn’t know any better. It took one man to pray for the nation and for rain. It might take just a few of us to pray for the whole world to be saved.

Are we willing to bring back a zeal in prayer, without being tired of seeing no result, or sometimes the very opposite of a result! It was only the 7th time that Elijah’s servant returned with the hint of good news. Seven of course is a number of completion, and perhaps we are yet to reach that completion in prayer, but what if we are on our 6th round- *Can we afford to give up just yet?*

That would bring us to another intercession that was just short of perfection. Remember Abraham interceding for Sodom and Gomorrah? How many times did he bargain with the Lord? You perhaps have guessed it by now. Six times! He came as low as 10 people but for some reason he doesn’t go lower! He put limits to the mercy of God! But God would save a city even for one person.

*Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, look and take note! Search her squares to see if you can find **a man**, one who does justice and seeks truth, that I may pardon her (Jeremiah 5:1).*

*I looked for **someone** among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found no one. (Ezekiel 22:30).*

May we be willing to keep asking for the will of God to be done, without putting limits on what He can do for and through us, knowing and believing He is the One we seek.
