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June 11, 2020

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“After the fire there was a tiny whispering sound” (1 Kings 19:12).

1 Kgs 19:9a, 11-16; Matt 5:27-32

In our post-Pentecost walk with the Holy Spirit, we are being taught to see God in all things. Every experience is a teachable moment, an invitation to see the invisible beneath the visible, the meaning behind the sign. A French philosopher once said, “Everything depends on how we interpret the silence.” Where some find only silence, absence and emptiness, others sense an unfathomable mystery pulsing just below the surface.

The prophet Elijah flees into the wilderness to escape the wrath of King Ahab and his Queen Jezebel. He falls dejected under a bush and prays for death, then into exhausted sleep. An angel awakens him twice to eat and drink, then sends him on to Mount Horeb, where Elijah shelters in a cave.

There occurs one of the singular theophanies of the Bible. It lets us glimpse the mystery of a God so totally *Other* yet *Intimate* to us in our need. The mountain is blasted by a roaring wind, but God is not in the wind; shaken by an earthquake, but God is not in the earthquake; then by fire, but God is not in the fire. In the sound of

a tiny whisper Elijah knows God is passing by. He covers his face with his cloak, steps out of the cave into the wake of the divine departure.

Perhaps this is what Simon and Garfunkel meant by the “sound of silence,” or what meteorologists call the calm before the storm, the eye of the hurricane. It could be the grace of the moment many have felt in the depth of despair when, suddenly, anguish ceases and a perfect stillness means the crisis is over, the fever has broken, the night is past and the dove is signaling the breath of dawn.

Life is short. A beloved aunt died at 102, but at her funeral we felt how brief her time with us really was. A grandnephew unable to attend sent a favorite poem to be shared describing life as the dash between the dates on a headstone. Not long after that, he himself died suddenly and inexplicably at age 40, a devastating loss that shocked everyone.

Current events also shock us and remind us that every life begins with a squalling gasp for air at birth and ends with a final breath followed absolute silence. Jesus saved his last breath to proclaim, “It is finished!” from the cross. Some die in their sleep; others begging for breath that was cruelly denied. We are confronted by the terrible silence that has followed so many deaths yet to be explained. TS Eliot wondered if the world would end with a bang or a whimper. It is an outrageous question, but one our planet must ask because of the bomb and now climate change. We have had our fill of wind, earthquake and fire, and now pray for hope. For those with ears to hear, it has always been there, but now must be lived.

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