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Today's Word

The Nineteenth Sunday, Year A (9 August)

Parish Priest: Father Hiroshi Konishi

First Reading: 1 Kings 19:9a, 11 - 13

Second Reading: Letter to the Romans 9:1 - 5

Gospel Reading: Gospel of Matthew 14:22 - 33

From the Three Readings

What emerges from these three readings is the reality of human beings who are torn between one choice and another.

In the First Reading, the prophet Elijah resolves to eliminate the worship of Baal from Israel as his mission. Although he triumphs over the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, his life is threatened by Queen Jezebel, a worshipper of Baal. Elijah flees to the wilderness in the south, where his faith begins to waver, and he pleads for death, saying, "O Lord, enough! Take my life" (1 Kings 19:4). At that moment, the word of God whispers to Elijah.

In the Second Reading, Paul is also in a state of confusion. Having declared, "Nothing in all creation can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 18:39), Paul goes so far as to say in today's reading, "I would be willing to be separated from Christ and cut off from God for the sake of my brothers and sisters" (19:3). He grieves and suffers for his fellow Jews, who have rejected Christ.

In the Gospel reading, the disciples, represented by Peter, are in a state of confusion. The boat is struggling to row against the strong wind. When Jesus says to him, "Come," Peter begins to walk on the water, but is suddenly seized by fear and begins to sink. Peter's heart is torn between his desire to reach Jesus and the terrifying reality of the wind and water. However, Jesus "immediately reached out his hand and caught him" (Matthew 14:31). Jesus stands firmly within our hearts, even as they are torn in a thousand directions. That is why it is so important to cry out for help, just as Elijah and Peter did.

Now, today's Gospel reading continues the story of feeding the five thousand.

The event in which as many as five thousand people were filled took place "toward evening" (Chapter 14, Verse 15, Franciscan Translation). The author of the *Gospel According to Matthew* may have had the scene of the Last Supper in mind. In today's reading as well, the events are described as taking place in darkness: "toward evening" (verse 23, New Common Translation) and "as day was breaking" (verse 25). There may not be much of a temporal connection between last week's and this

week's readings. Rather, the background likely was the anguish of the early Church as it struggled within the secular world of the darkness of night.

Furthermore, if we consider the Old Testament as a foreshadowing of the Gospels (a concept known as typology), last week's Gospel passage may be related to the story of the Israelites eating manna in the desert (Exodus 16), while this week's passage may be linked to the crossing of the Red Sea (Exodus 14).

Please pay close attention to verse 28: "Lord, if it is you, ..."

A literal translation would be, "Lord, if it is you, command me to walk on the water before you." The phrase "if it is you" allows for two possible interpretations. One is that Peter, doubting whether the figure on the water was Jesus, meant, "Lord, if it really is you," while the other is, "Lord, was it you? Then command me to walk on the water before you." The latter interpretation is likely more appropriate. This is because the disciples later make a confession of faith, declaring, "You are the Son of God" (see verse 32). Furthermore, in verse 26, they were "terrified" (Franciscan Translation) upon seeing Jesus, mistaking him for a "ghost." In other words, they did not conclude that Jesus was a ghost; rather, their judgment was clouded, causing them to perceive him as if he were a ghost.