

A LENT WITH THE PROPHET ELIJAH

Invitation to Presence

*I live without living in myself,
Since I die of love,
Living apart from love,
I live now in the Lord
Who has desired me for Himself.
He inscribed on my heart
When I gave it to Him:
I die because I do not die.*

Within this divine prison,
Of love in which I live,
My God my captive is.
My heart is free
To behold my prisoner-God,
Passion welling in my heart,
I die because I do not die.

That life from above,
That is true life,
Until this life dies,
Life is not enjoyed.
Death, be not aloof;
In dying first, may life be,
I die because I do not die.

(St Teresa, Poetry)

Focus

To gain insight into the mystery of the cross that may be present in our lives.

Opening Prayer

O dearest Lord Jesus, who endured the cross for our salvation, grant that we may enter more deeply into its mystery and receive its eternal blessings with you in your glory.
Amen

Love So Amazing, So Divine

When I survey the wondrous Cross
On which the Prince of Glory died
My richest Gain I count but Loss
And pour Contempt on all my Pride

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast
Save in the Death of Christ my God
All the vain Things that charm me most
I sacrifice them to his Blood.

See from his Head, his Hands, his Feet
Sorrow and Love flow mingled down
Did e'er such Love and Sorrow meet
Or Thorns compose so rich a Crown

His dying Crimson, like a Robe
Spreads o'er his Body on the Tree
Then am I dead to all the Globe
And all the Globe is dead to me

Were the whole Realm of Nature mine
That were a Present far too small
Love so amazing, so divine
Demands my Soul, my Life, my All



*We adore you, O Christ, and we bless you;
because by your cross you have redeemed the world!*

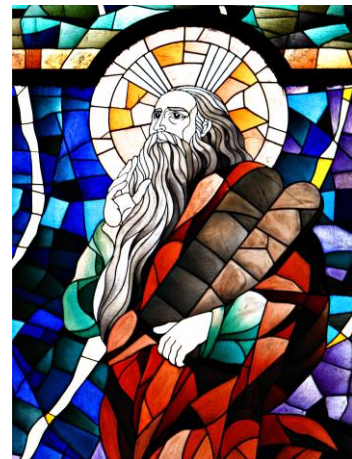
ELIJAH ON MOUNT CARMEL

Scripture Reading (1 Kings 18:16-40)

So Obadiah went to meet Ahab and told him, and Ahab went to meet Elijah. When he saw Elijah, he said to him, "Is that you, you troubler of Israel?" "I have not made trouble for Israel," Elijah replied. "But you and your father's family have. You have abandoned the Lord's commands and have followed the Baals. Now summon the people from all over Israel to meet me on Mount Carmel. And bring the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table."

So Ahab sent word throughout all Israel and assembled the prophets on Mount Carmel. Elijah went before the people and said, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him." But the people said nothing.

Then Elijah said to them, "I am the only one of the Lord's prophets left, but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets. Get two bulls for us. Let Baal's prophets choose one for themselves, and let them cut it into pieces and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the Lord. The god who answers by fire—he is God." Then all the people said, "What you say is good." Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, "Choose one of the bulls and prepare it first, since there are so many of you. Call on the name of your god, but do not light the fire." So they took the bull given them and prepared it. Then they called on the name of Baal from morning till noon. "Baal, answer us!" they shouted. But there was no response; no one answered. And they danced around the altar they had made.



At noon Elijah began to taunt them. "Shout louder!" he said. "Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened." So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed. Midday passed, and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice. But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention.

Then Elijah said to all the people, "Come here to me." They came to him, and he repaired the altar of the Lord, which had been torn down. Elijah took twelve stones, one for each of the tribes descended from Jacob, to whom the word of the Lord had come, saying, "Your name shall be Israel." With the stones he built

an altar in the name of the Lord, and he dug a trench around it large enough to hold two measures of seed. He arranged the wood, cut the bull into pieces and laid it on the wood. Then he said to them, "Fill four large jars with water and pour it on the offering and on the wood."

"Do it again," he said, and they did it again.

"Do it a third time," he ordered, and they did it the third time. The water ran down around the altar and even filled the trench.

At the time of the offering of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: "Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. Answer me, Lord, answer me, so these people will know that you, Lord, are God, and that you are turning their hearts back again."

Then the fire of the Lord fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench. When all the people saw this, they fell prostrate and cried, "The Lord—he is God! The Lord—he is God!" Then Elijah commanded them, "Seize the prophets of Baal. Don't let anyone get away!" They seized them, and Elijah had them brought down to the Kishon Valley and slaughtered there.



CONSUMING LOVE

Alexander of Mary Queen Beauty of Carmel, OCD

The cross is one symbol that is representative of the journey of Lent. In the time of early Christianity, the symbol of the cross was a symbol of shame for it was an instrument of punishment used by the Roman state for the execution of those considered criminals and enemies of the state. To the Jewish mind in Roman times, to die on the cross was to be cursed and St Paul refers to this when he sees in Christ's death on the cross, not only a liberation from such a notion (see Gal. 3:13; Deut 21:23), but, in fact, the supreme demonstration of Christ's love for us; that Christ not minding the ignominy of death on the cross would even embrace it in order to show how much he loves us.

The hymn, 'When I Survey the Wondrous Cross' written by Isaac Watts in 1707 captures both Paul's wonderment at God's love for us revealed in the mystery of the Cross and the all-consuming nature of that love. The truth of the second half of the last stanza of this hymn: "Love so amazing, so divine / Demands my Soul, my Life, my All", is what we see playing out in the contest on Mount Carmel in the life of Elijah the prophet. It was also what inspired

Paul to declare in Galatians 2:20 "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." And also, in 6:14 "May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world." We too are invited to take a stand for God's all-consuming love which may be revealed to us in the form of a cross or crosses that we meet in life. And Lent is a graced moment when we can enter into the depths of the mystery of love at the heart of each cross and be transformed by it.

Questions to Ponder

Ponder the following. Sit in silence. Pray first. Make a note of insights received.

One of the ways that the early Christians read holy Scripture, and indeed the Church still does so today, was to see in the persons and events of the Old Testament as prefiguring persons and events that were to come or be realised in the New Testament or in the life of the Church. This is referred to as typology. In other words, the person or event in question is a 'type of' who or what later came or will come to be.

The story of the contest between Elijah, the priest, prophet, and pastor of the Lord God of Israel and the prophets of Baal and Asherah is a beautiful example that can serve for a typological reading of Scripture. From it we can draw so much inspiration for our Lenten journey. The scene of the contest, Mount Carmel, stands for a place of decision which for each of us comes down to our very hearts. The people also represent each person in every age who is invited to make the fundamental choice that determines who we are and whose we really are. Elijah, of course, is a type of Christ in his threefold mission as priest, prophet and pastor of God's people. He is a model for us but it is in the person of Christ that both Elijah and ourselves are called to see and claim our truest identity. In the exercises that follow we will be reflecting on aspects of these types in the story and the meaning they hold for us today.

Exercise One: Mount Carmel – The Mount of Decision

*Choose this day
whom you will serve,
but as for me and my
house, we will serve
the Lord.*

Joshua 24:15



*Ahab called all Israel together and assembled the prophets on **Mount Carmel**. Elijah stepped out in front of all the people. 'How long,' he said, 'do you mean to hobble first on one leg then on the other? If Yahweh is God, follow him; if Baal, follow him.' But **the people never said a word**. Elijah then said to them, 'I, I alone, am left as a prophet of Yahweh.'*

1 Kings 18:20-22

On Mount Carmel the battle for the heart raged just as it continues to be fought today. On this mountain was the Order of Carmel born, a community within the Church that symbolises an oasis of peace and beauty, a sacred space for constant loving communion with God. As St Therese of Lisieux puts it so well, "In the heart of my mother the Church, I will be love." To this same vocation are all Carmelites called and indeed, all Christians. Carmel means God's garden in Hebrew and recalls for us the beauty of the garden of Eden where God walked in friendship with Adam and Eve in the cool of the evening (see Gen 3:8). However, Carmel also reminds us, in the great contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal, that if we do not guard our hearts the same suggestions of the enemy who ruined the happiness of our first parents in Eden could ruin ours as well. This may come through our indecisiveness to consistently choose not just the good but the better and the best for Christ which may mean taking up our cross and following him. You may wish to pause and ponder:

- **Am I aware of the great spiritual warfare that goes on within my heart?**
- **At some of the opportunities that invite me to say another 'Yes' to God, have I rather preferred to remain mute or indecisive like the people of Israel on Mount Carmel rather than embrace the cross?**
- **Is there a 'Baal' in my life taking the place that is God's alone? As 'Baal' means among other things, 'lord' and 'owner', to whom does my heart belong? Is Christ the Lord of my life?**
- **Like the people who were helped by Elijah's witness to rededicate their lives to God, who can help me in my spiritual journey towards intimacy with Christ?**



Exercise Two: A Sacrifice of Love



‘Yahweh, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel,’ he said, ‘let them know today that you are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, that I have done all these things at your command. Answer me, Yahweh, answer me, so that this people may know that you, Yahweh, are God and are winning back their hearts.’ Then the fire of Yahweh fell and consumed the holocaust and wood and licked up the water in the trench. When all the people saw this they fell on their faces. ‘Yahweh is God,’ they cried, ‘Yahweh is God.’

1 Kings 18:36-39

Elijah’s prayer on Mount Carmel for the people of Israel is very revelatory of the mystery of God’s all-consuming love. He asks that God may reveal to Israel God’s enduring love that patiently waits for the return of the prodigal. The prayer is a statement that God never gives up on anyone and the answer by fire confirms this for Israel on Mount Carmel. This event surely echoes the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32. **How often do I not find myself in Israel’s position or in the place of the prodigal son?** Israel, a priestly and royal people was designated to be a mentor for spiritual and moral guidance to all the peoples of the world. Through Israel’s guidance these were to become part of God’s family. Yet, time and time again, Israel would turn to other gods because they wanted to be like the very nations for whom they should instead be a light. Or, the prodigal son on whom the father lavished so much love but whose heart was instead directed elsewhere.

- **Do I take out sometime each day to think of God’s love and care for me or do I focus on the negatives in life whatever they may be?**
- **How often do I relax in appreciative abandonment to the mystery of God’s love?**
- **Even when things might not seem to be perfect for me, do I consider the other blessings in my life and be grateful for those?**

It is interesting to observe that God’s fire was all-consuming. It did not just descend on the sacrificial offering on the altar but in fact, it consumed the

holocaust and wood and licked up the water in the trench. Perhaps we may pause and pray:

***O fire of God, O Divine Spirit of Love,
descend upon the altar of my heart
and burn up all that is within it
that does not belong to God.***

***I belong to God's consecrated and priestly people.
Together with Elijah the priest,
at this hour of sacrifice,
I place my heart on your holy altar.***

***Receive it as an acceptable sacrifice of love.
Let me know that you are winning back my heart
and let my whole being declare,
'The Lord is God!'
Amen.***



Exercise Three: **Zelo zelatus sum**



Then the prophet Elijah arose like a fire, his word flaring like a torch. It was he who brought famine on them, and who decimated them in his zeal. By the word of the Lord, he shut up the heavens, he also, three times, brought down fire. How glorious you were in your miracles, Elijah!
Sir 48:1-4

Then Elijah commanded them, "Seize the prophets of Baal. Don't let anyone get away!" They seized them, and Elijah had them brought down to the Kishon Valley and slaughtered there.
1 Kings 18:40

'Surely those who dwell in Carmel would have caught from the flame a spark of the love and zeal which burned in the great Prophet. Fire is the most expressive symbol of love. 'I am come to cast fire on the earth.'... It is the mark of the true follower of Elijah. It burns in all the Carmelite saints. Especially do we see it in the soul of seraphic St Teresa of Avila. The smouldering fires that burned in the soul of 'this undaunted daughter of desires' is Carmel's greatest witness to the spirit of Elijah. In these great souls have been fulfilled the Prophet's words which encircle the Order's escutcheon, 'With zeal I have been zealous for the Lord God of Hosts.'" These words are taken from a lecture given by Blessed Titus Brandsma, *In the Spirit and Strength of Elijah*, at the Catholic University in Washington, in the summer of 1935. It captures the true spirit of Carmel.

Yet, when the great prophet declared at Horeb, also known as Sinai, 'With zeal I have been zealous for the Lord God of Hosts', he undoubtedly had in mind his exploits in the name of the Lord, including the slaughter of the prophets of Baal. Indeed, that action on Mount Carmel would inspire others down the ages who though truly zealous for the honour due to God would often forget to imitate the God who reaches people not through the force of arguments or coercion but by way of winning hearts.

Jesus would rebuke James and John when they wished to call down fire in the spirit of Elijah on those who would not accept Jesus. 'You don't seem to realise the spirit you should have; the Son of Man did not come to destroy people's lives, but to save them', he said to them (see Luke 9:51-56). Elijah surely heard his own rebuke when God did not manifest himself to him as he would usually do through the great elements of nature – fire and thunder (Exodus 19:16-25; 20:18), earthquake (Ps 60:2; 68:8-9; 104:32; Jer 10:10; Nahum 1:5; Job 9:6; Acts 4:31) – but instead in ***the whistle of a gentle breeze*** (1 Kings 19:12). You may wish to ponder and pray:

- **In what ways can the zeal which burned in the great Prophet Elijah also burn in me in gentleness and love?**
- **Am I moved to win hearts for Christ? Do I refrain on account of the cross that might be involved?**
- **In a world marked by much violence especially in speech and in the social media, how can I be a channel through which God's gentle presence is revealed?**
- **Do I bring a peaceful prayerful presence to those I meet and live with?**

Closing Prayer

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
 Where there is hatred, let me bring love.
 Where there is offense, let me bring pardon.
 Where there is discord, let me bring union.
 Where there is error, let me bring truth.
 Where there is doubt, let me bring faith.
 Where there is despair, let me bring hope.
 Where there is darkness, let me bring your light.
 Where there is sadness, let me bring joy.

O Master, let me not seek as much
 to be consoled as to console,
 to be understood as to understand,
 to be loved as to love,

For it is in giving that one receives,
 it is in self-forgetting that one finds,
 it is in pardoning that one is pardoned,
 it is in dying that one is raised to eternal life.

(St Francis of Assisi)



VIDEO RESOURCES

St Thérèse: Doctor of Daring Prayer – An Exploration of Thérèse’s Personal Prayer in order to Expand and Enrich Our Own – Rev. Canon John Udris, STL

Part 1

Part 2

Anyone who prays knows that prayer can sometimes be trying. It should actually not come as a surprise since struggling with the experience of prayer is part of the way we are schooled in prayer. Taking St. Thérèse as a model, Canon Udris explores issues of difficulties in prayer, aridity and the apparent absence of God and propose how we too can work through these difficulties necessary for growth in prayer as well as help others who may sometimes find prayer a challenge.

