

Elijah in the first reading; Paul, who wrote our second reading; Matthew, the writer of the Gospel; these names are so familiar to us from the Bible.

But do we think of them as real flesh and blood people like us, or just names we hear at Mass?

I can certainly think of Elijah as a person like me, but not so much from the encounter He has with the Lord God in today's reading, as earlier in the chapter it comes from.

There, Elijah has come to the end of his tether because of what life has thrown at him.

So, he flees into the wilderness, sits under a solitary tree and prays to the Lord: "I have had enough Lord. Take my life. Then he lay down and slept" 1 Ki. 19: 4 – 5

Having, a few years ago now, suffered from depression myself, I think this is what afflicted Elijah.

After some sleep, the Angel of the Lord – the Old Testament's way of saying God Himself – touched Elijah, and told him to get up and eat.

Not some huge display of power by the Lord, but the simplicity of offering Elijah just what he needed for body and soul at that moment – food and drink to sustain him.

Elijah eats and drinks, and then lay down again; but the Lord has more in store for him, and invites him to eat and drink some more so that he can enough strength for his journey to meet the Lord at Mount Sinai.

In fact, that food and drink is enough to sustain Elijah for a journey of forty days and nights to his final destination.

In today's first reading, that's where we meet Elijah, just after the Lord has asked him what he's doing on that holy mountain.

The same mountain where Moses met the Lord God, having brought God's People out of slavery in Egypt; then leading them for forty years in the wilderness on their journey to the Promised Land.

Elijah, in a real sense has relived that journey in his own life, and the Lord has been with him every step of the way.

However, Elijah is still feeling as if all the good things he's done to try to bring His people back to the Lord, has been futile.

So Elijah says to the Lord: "I have zealously served the Lord God Almighty. But the people of Israel have broken their covenant with you, and killed every one of your prophets. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too." 1 Ki. 19: 10

He's, humanly speaking, had enough; he can't see a way out of the mess, but He's faithfully followed the Lord.

And so the Lord comes to him in the sound: "Of a gentle whisper." 1 Ki. 19: 12

Elijah knows he's in the presence of the Eternal God, so he covers his face with his cloak out of humility and reverence.

God has strengthened him by His gentle whisper, and sends Elijah back to his everyday life – but that's not the end of the story.

The Lord gives Elisha to Elijah to assist, help, and support him in his work.

When Elijah was at his lowest, the Lord came to him as a gentle whisper, and gave him practical help too.

Elijah was a great prophet of God, but wasn't able to look God directly in the face – we can, because God has taken our frail flesh in Jesus of Nazareth.

Paul says to us: "The Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." 2 Cor. 3: 17 – 18

Paul, himself, had seen the Lord face to face at his dramatic conversion on the Damascus Road. Peter and the Disciples, in the boat on the Sea of Galilee, see God in Jesus face to face as He walks across the stormy water to save them.

At that moment of their deepest terror and fear, Jesus came to them to calm their fear and terror. Above the storms of our life, Jesus speaks to us in those same words He spoke to the Disciples: "Don't be afraid. Take courage. I am here!" Mt. 14: 27

Jesus says that to Peter too, and asks him to have the faith to walk across the waters to Him. But Peter, having a doubting sort of faith – just like us – can't quite believe Jesus; so he begins to sink.

At that very moment, Jesus stretches out His hand, and saves him.

Through this miraculous 'sign,' Jesus assures us that the storms swirling around us will never overturn the boat of our life, and swallow us up in darkness.

So let's never lose faith that Jesus does calm the storms of our life.

He's in the boat with us; during the darkest night, and the heaviest storms.

He never abandons those who come seeking His mercy, and His forgiveness.

He walks upon the waters; He calms the storm. He guides us into safe harbour.

Whatever life throws at us, we have to look to Jesus; even though it seems impossible at times: because, for us, Jesus is: "An ever-fixed mark, that looks on tempests and is never shaken." William Shakespeare: Sonnet 116