

## **Someone to look up to**

Many of us can encounter difficulties to relate to a certain number of passages of the Hebrew Bible. The names of the characters and cities for one, are hard to pronounce; the history and geography are not well known to us, as are the culture and traditions of the Israelites, and of course the violence present in many stories, human violence but also God's wrath, often make us suspicious of the theology. Yet, if we manage to look beyond all of that, we may discover something of great value. It's not that the Hebrew Bible always offers to us a very coherent discourse about God, after all it's not an essay written by scholars, but the Hebrew Bible tells us a lot about the human heart and its struggles when we open up to the work of the Spirit in our lives.

In this, the story we have today is very touching and can deeply move us, if we manage to not get too much caught in the well known imagery of the prophet Elijah taken away in a chariot of fire. If we listen closely to the story, we may actually discover that this is not so much about Elijah, than it is about Elisha, the story of his loss, his anxiety and his despair as his master is taken away from him. This episode may resonate deeply within us, because most of us have been through this experience in a way or another. Maybe we didn't lose a prophet, yet for all of us, at some point, we have lost a father figure, and we made this experience of being left behind. The father we lose does not necessarily have to be a father for us to make this experience of loss. What happens is that, at some point, the one who used to give us guidance, the one who used to make us feel safe, and even loved, is taken away from us, in a way or another. At some point, as we grow and mature, and this can happen suddenly or gradually, we understand that there is no one to watch over us, above us. And this is scary. Even later in life, losing our parents is still very difficult. Not only because we miss them, but strangely, even though they may have died in their eighties or nineties, we still had this feeling that they could somehow protect us. As long as they were here, we didn't feel alone in the world. We weren't left behind. Someone else was above us. But surely one day comes, and this is the day for Elisha, when the Father is taken away from us.

I guess this is where the disciples are as well in our Gospel today. If you have attended our forum about Mark's Gospel, we have discussed the construction of its narrative: The first part of the Gospel is a crescendo towards Peter's confession that Jesus is the Son of God. After Jesus' baptism and the beginning of his ministry, the miracles abound, Jesus' s power and authority are affirmed, we discover more and more clearly who Jesus is and this is what our Gospel today, the Transfiguration, is all about: On the mount Tabor, we see literally in bright light who Jesus is.

From this high point, not only as a physical mountaintop but as a climax in the structure of the story, everything is going downhill: Jesus is attacked by his enemies, people refuse to believe, he is arrested and dies in despair on the cross (Mark is the only one mentioning that Jesus dies hopeless, his last cry being: *My God, my God why have you forsaken me*). As bright as the day of the Transfiguration is, we can see a cloud starting to overshadow the disciples: the Master is going to be taken away from them. And this darkness is not accidental, this darkness, it is said, comes from Godself. From now on, the disciples are invited to look at Jesus in a new light, or should I say, *in a new darkness*. Until the day of the Transfiguration, the disciples literally "looked up" at Jesus, the rabbi, the Master, the Messiah, the Father figure or the one pointing to the Father. Now Jesus is going to reveal Godself on the cross. No wonder Simon Peter wants to stop the movement of the Gospel and plant a tent there - this Gospel that, as we mentioned several times, goes from immediacy to immediacy, never catches its breath, but now is time to stop and plant a tent, because nobody wants to go downhill.

And so you see, what Peter says about building a dwelling is not silly at all, or else we are all silly, because we all do that, try to capture God. Of course, intellectually speaking, most of us know that we cannot put God in a box, we don't believe that God is here and not there, even in our church where we use a Tabernacle (Tabernacle is actually what tent / dwelling means, it refers to the tent where the Hebrews used to keep the arc of the covenant while there were still nomads). So I guess we don't struggle too much to think about God in a non spatial way, but yet we have a tendency to trap God in concepts and beliefs, laws and moral rules, we can't resist the temptation to believe we "know" who God is (= an authoritarian Father figure) and we "assume" what God wants us to do (= God wants us to behave).

From there, yet, if we stop for a second, acknowledging that if God is often a Father figure, it also means that at some point it is the role of the Father to disappear. God is not only in the light, but God is to be found in darkness, in loss, in despair, in times of confusion. Jesus will have to lose God as a Father figure to be able to reveal himself as the Messiah, the one who brings God when the darkness comes in. This is in this "in between moment" where we find ourselves in our readings today, but it is also where we are liturgically speaking, moving from Epiphany into Lent, from the joy of the incarnation to the pain of the cross. But this is also the cycle of life, right? Building up and growing and then losing, experiencing our limits and experiencing loss.

Yet, finding the cycle of life into the liturgical cycle, we also understand that it is not only about the two folding shape of our lives, being young and then being old, the building up and destroying are two aspects of our life that keep repeating themselves all our life long like the seasons, and the wonder in that in both of them a revelation is given to us. We find God and then we lose God, and then we find God again, because God is not in the Tabernacle, God is not in the tent, God is never what we believe God is. God builds up and God tears apart, not to annihilate but to bring newness to human life, like Fall and Spring bring newness to nature. Elisha loses Elijah, but in the process, he becomes the one he is called to be. As the theologian Jurgen Moltman puts it: "The Holy Spirit unites what is separated and separates what is united, and in this very movement, life is created".

Because in the end, of course, it all comes down to the Holy Spirit, and this is actually what Elisha asks for: "Please, let me inherit a double share of your Spirit". Elisha knows that he won't be forsaken if he has a share of his Master's spirit. In the experience of suffering, God will disappear for Jesus as the protective Father. As he dies on the cross, Jesus will disappear for us. But in the Resurrection, the Holy Spirit is given to us. God does not comfort us always as an all powerful Father who can make everything all right, Jesus does not only comfort us with the knowledge that he went through our darkness, the Holy Spirit is given to us so we may have God within ourselves, so we may act God in our lives and in the world. When the Holy Spirit fills us, God comes forth from the inside, we don't need to look up and wait for a savior anymore, we build power, we have power over our own lives.

This power is not the power of money or the power of social status. The power of the Holy Spirit is the power we are given to become our own selves, whom we were created to be, it's the power to know the truth and to live in the truth, it's the power to dare asking and to be willing to receive the love we need, it's the power to surrender to God and to let God use us to God's service. In this process, we are built up and torn down over and over again, made a new creation. In this process, we become at our turn sons and daughters of God.

God is not only here to be this Father figure that helps us to cope, God wants to turn our lives around and act inside of them. In the end, it's not about the transfiguration of Jesus, it's about our own transformation. On that day, the disciples look up not only at their Savior, they are looking at a mirror, at whom they are called to become, they are revealed what their true nature in God is. So now, and Lent is certainly the right path to that, it's our turn to let God transform us, God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.