

It's a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God. Don't be fooled by the gentle breeze: Elijah is being commissioned to wreak havoc on Israel's enemies. When the Godfather speaks quietly his Mafia underlings know they have to listen! That's perhaps overstating the drama here, that is, the dramatic nature of the quiet voice, but there is no doubting the drama of God's voice, in Jesus, in the gospel passage, *Courage! It is I! do not be afraid.* Both Elijah and Peter are being reassured that, when wind and wave or fire and earthquake make the very ground on which they stand uncertain, God is still with them, that they haven't been abandoned to the elements of this world but that through these very elements God's will will still be done – and this will is, at the time of the writing down of these dramas, still the salvation of a particular people as a focus of God's will for all people. And, as any Jew will tell you, *It's a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the living God* – to be that focal point; hence, the anguish of Paul in his letter to the Romans, prepared, like Moses, to surrender his own position in the Chosen People in order to save them.

So these passages are not firstly about us, the Gentiles, as God's focus, but of God's love for his people, the Jews, and desire for them to continue, or become again, a light to the nations, the place where God's love for all, God's presence, is most visible. And we can read out from the anxiety and anguish that Elijah, and Peter, and Paul, and Jesus undergo, something of the anguish of God on our behalf, and that *we* are to undergo on behalf of others. Every parent knows this anguish – and it doesn't go away even when we have a day off, a time away in a quiet cave or on a lonely mountain. We are, of course, talking about the nature of love. What we are being reminded of is our relationship to God as God's adopted children, both as Jews, and as Gentiles grafted on to the Jewish vine. And the Incarnation tells us that, even as adopted children, it's a blood relationship. God can no more let us go than a parent could their very own child, and vice versa, though many of us may be in denial of this for most of the time. Amnesia or denial is so much more comforting than dealing with a living God, and a *loving* God even more so, for love necessarily implies responsibility, as when the child becomes the parent of the mother or father; another dramatic way of imaging our growth is Christ. Elijah and Peter and Paul are being taught how to be images of God, loving others and themselves as God loves us. And it can be done quite quietly or with the occasional clap of thunder – but it will be done. Like any child, ultimately, we have to stand on our own two feet.

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