

MEDITATION ON A LITTLE CLOUD OF PROMISE

During the ministry of Elijah the prophet, when Ahab and Jezebel ruled the northern kingdom, a great famine spread throughout the land, due to a lack of rain. For three years and six months (Lk 4:25) Elijah was fed by God, first through the ravens and then through the widow in Zarephath. When the appointed time came, God told Elijah to meet with Ahab, and after the famous confrontation with the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel, which turned the people to repentance, Elijah, by faith, heard “a sound of abundance of rain” (1 Ki 18:41).

Before the rain came, however, Elijah determined that his servant, a man without this great faith, needed a lesson on the faithfulness of God. As Elijah prayed, he told his servant to go and look toward the sea. We can imagine his excitement as he probably ran to the vantage point overlooking the vast Mediterranean Sea. After so many years without rain, we see him anxiously examining the sky for some sign, looking in all directions, his eyes squinted against the blinding sun, but failing to see any promise of rain. It is interesting to note that in his reporting back to Elijah, the Hebrew text just has the word, “nothing.” The translators of our KJB chose to supply the words, “There is” rather than “I saw.” If the servant had said, “I saw nothing,” he would have taken the responsibility for his lack of faith. By saying, “*There is nothing,*” he slights both Elijah and Elijah’s God. Elijah’s response was not condemning; he merely said, “Go again seven times” (vs 43).

It occurs to me that we often show the same failure as we await an answer to prayer. We look for it with great excitement as we expect it immediately. Elijah’s servant, no doubt, expected to see black skies, composed of huge billowing thunderclouds, approaching from the west. His response, “*There is nothing,*” could have expressed his surprise.

How often our surprise at “nothing” leads to doubt as we experience God’s lack of response. We continue to present our supplication before the throne of grace, but each time, our excitement wanes as our expectation diminishes. Did Elijah’s servant run excitedly the second time? What about the third time, and the fourth? By the fifth time we can visualize his slow, dejected trek up the mountainside as he was probably saying to himself, “What’s the use?” By the sixth time, his going was probably out of obedience rather than a sincere belief in the power of prayer. How many times have we continued in prayer, but in unbelief?

Thankfully, the goodness of God overrides our failures. The seventh time, Elijah’s servant saw a teeny cloud, no bigger than a man’s hand, far away on the horizon. Suddenly his hope revived, his excitement returned, and his faith was renewed as that little cloud of promise grew larger and darker, eventually filling the sky and producing torrents of life-sustaining rain.

Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive *them*, and ye shall have *them*. (Mark 11:24)