

CONFORMED TO CHRIST

The prophet's journey

by Mary Sharon Moore

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One of the longest journeys of my life was an 1,800 mile one-way trip from my beloved, forested, ocean-bordered, snowcap-mountained, many rivered native western Oregon to a state in rural America known for howling winds and icebox winters—a land with a beauty all its own.

But when I made that journey, I kind of cheated. I drove those 1,800 miles in my comfortable car, following the 15-foot rental truck that carried all my earthly possessions. Some journey.

So I am fascinated by Elijah's journey (1 Kg 19:4-8) where, fleeing for his life, the prophet goes a day's journey into the desert, lays down under a broom tree, and asks God to take his life. But an angel of the Lord touches him and orders him to wake up and eat. Beside him Elijah finds a hearth cake and a jug of water. So he eats, drinks, lays down again and falls asleep. Again the angel comes, tells him to wake up and eat, "else the journey will be too long for you!" Elijah gets up, eats and drinks, and then "strengthened by that food, he walked forty days and forty nights to the mountain of God."

We've lost that sense of journey and the arduous, physical work it entails. We easily forget how personally demanding our journey of faith is.

Unlike Elijah's hearth cake and jug of water, we eat the far finer food of Eucharist; we drink the Blood of Christ. Still we fall back into our stupor, oftentimes feeling too

overwhelmed by life and the chaos of the world to faithfully press on.

Yet like that persistent angel, the Lord himself keeps waking us, rousing us from our stupor and discouragement, saying to us, "Wake up and eat, else the journey will be too long for you!"

Elijah's story highlights another detail. The prophets of biblical times were few and far between, sent by God on a tough mission. Who are the prophets today? They are you and me. In Baptism we were anointed for our prophetic role, sent into the wilderness of contemporary culture.

Our prophetic work is to read the signs of the times through the lens of the Gospel. This is the prophetic aspect of your vocation: To read the signs of the times through the lens of the Gospel. Which means you have to personally read the Gospel, chew it, swallow it, and let it become you—body, soul, mind, attitude, imagination, heart. And you have to pay attention to the world's anguish—the injustices, the assaults on human life and dignity, assaults on God's creation—and act accordingly.

I cannot stop war and terror and genocide. But I can inform myself of the Church's teaching on war and acts of inhumanity. I can dig deep into the Gospels to understand this young man from Nazareth who was nonviolent to the core. I can determine daily, in every situation and encounter, to be not merely "for peace" but "of peace."

I cannot end discrimination and exclusion and persecution—all a violence against God's love. But I can counter by expressing hospitality toward those who suffer discrimination and exclusion. I can hold myself accountable to God when I determine, even secretly, who is worthy of a kind word, a gesture of dignity, a sense of inclusion, and who is not.

I cannot reverse the greed of those who prey on others, but I can identify the pockets of greed in my own life, and hold myself

accountable for my attitudes of hoarding or misuse of resources, or sly actions that prey on others' vulnerability.

Daily I can pray that the light of God's justice and mercy will penetrate the hidden recesses of human anguish, and that God's reign will extend to the farthest reaches of creation.

This is our prophet's journey today, an intentional vocational journey, our one-way journey into the reign of God.

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