

Sermon by the Rt. Rev. Leo Frade
at the Consecration of the Rt. Rev. Mary Gray-Reeves
Saratoga, California
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I want you to imagine with me just for a few moments those two men of God, Elijah and Elisha, on their way from Bethel to Jericho. The lesson from the Hebrew Scriptures that we read a moment ago tells us of this nostalgic trip of Elijah the prophet, now at the end of his career, accompanied by Elisha, the younger assistant whom he had personally chosen a few years before. They had been working together for some time and had become very good friends, but now they both knew that the time was near for them to go their separate ways.

As they traveled from town to town, the local clergy kept reminding Elisha that the end of his boss, the old prophet, was near, but he didn't want to hear about it. Not only would it be hard to say good-bye to a dear friend and mentor, but he was not looking forward to being left alone in the midst of all the problems that the people of God were facing at that time.

After they arrived in Jericho, the old prophet Elijah once more tried to discourage his younger assistant from continuing further on the trip, urging him again to stay behind. But Elisha didn't want to hear any of this either. He was going to be with his mentor until the very end.

The story that follows is quite fascinating, because it contains a biblical description of a person flying. But what is of greatest interest for us this morning is the conversation that transpired just before the arrival of the flying chariot of fire: I am referring to the final exchange between the old prophet Elijah and his younger assistant Elisha.

When they finally arrived in what we could only describe as a departure lounge, the old prophet surprised his assistant by telling him: "Tell me what I may do for you, before I am taken from you."

Elisha's answer also came as a surprise: "Please, let me inherit a double share of your spirit."

The Old Prophet was not expecting Elisha's request, and he said: "You have asked a hard thing, yet if you see me as I am taken from you, it will be granted, if not, it will not."

Just at that moment boarding starts--Elijah gets into the Chariot of Fire and God's charter flight takes off.

The story then leaves us with Elisha standing by himself, wondering if his petition had been granted. Had he received a double share of his mentor's spirit?

The answer comes when he picks up the old prophet's mantle that was left behind and returns to the Jordan River. When he strikes the waters with his mantle, they part, and he is able to cross to the other side.

It is at that moment that he--and the other clergy watching the scene from afar--are able to realize that a double portion of God's spirit is now resting on Elisha. He is not anymore an assistant to the prophet, but a prophet himself.

Now, before I continue, I don't want you to get any ideas that I am insinuating that you should compare your Bishop-elect, my former assistant, Archdeacon Mary Gray-Reeves, with Elisha, or that I am pretending to be like the old prophet Elijah. Frankly, I am personally satisfied with just being Leo the Great—whose feast we celebrate today!

Also, you have to admit that if you take a good look at your new bishop she doesn't look like any Elisha you have ever known.

Besides, in my case it would be impossible to pretend to be like the Elijah, who flew away on a Chariot of Fire. You see, it happens that I am a Cuban--and you know very well that when Cubans leave their country they are not into flying. It is a known fact that now for over 40 years we have preferred using boats or rafts.

On the other hand, though I may not be an old prophet, I am an old bishop. I am currently in the 24th year of my episcopacy, and I have served as the Diocesan Bishop in two different dioceses. I have also served under four different Presiding Bishops, and at present I am the Senior Bishop with Jurisdiction in the House of Bishops.

A lot of time has passed since I put on my first round collar, and all during that time I have witnessed how God's grace cares for those who do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with their God.

When I began my ministry in this Church it was also a very conflicted and divisive time. We were in the midst of changing our Book of Common Prayer. (I am referring to the 1928 book, not the one from 1892.) But the big fight that was also taking place at the time had to do with women's ordination. There were constant predictions that this would be the end of the church, that the Anglican Communion was unraveling, and that we had abandoned the true faith. Well, we did not abandon the true faith and the Church didn't crumble. I presume that our Lord Jesus doesn't mind what style of language we use for our prayer books—even modern American English--and I'm sure that his Holy Mother taught him well, so he would be no misogynist.

Mary, I want you to know that I have come here this morning to ask God to also grant you a double share of God's grace in order that you may be able to face the challenges that will come your way. Being a bishop now, as in the past, is not an easy task. But always know that you, like all the truly faithful bishops that have preceded you, are not defenseless. I can affirm what the Apostle Paul said: God will never allow you to face a difficult situation without providing you with enough grace to be able to face and deal with any predicament that comes your way.

I am aware that you will face challenges that are different from those of the past. I have to acknowledge that I come from a generation of clergy that used mimeograph machines to prepare our bulletins, and for most of our ministry did not have to deal with computers, Blackberries or even faxes. One of the greatest technological advances we had to go through was when we got touch-tone phones and had to get used to *not* dialing.

During my generation when we got home from a trip we were not followed by hundreds of emails, and our work patiently waited for us to get back to the office. No one expected an immediate answer from their bishop, 24-7.

The challenges you will face require the vigor, knowledge and technical know-how of your generation. I pray that with a double share of God's grace you will be able to guide our Church in the wise use of all the technology that is available out there. After all, in a few moments you will become the bishop of Silicon Valley, so I expect that in a few years instead of using a book for Common Prayer, we'll all be

sitting in our churches with our iPhones or Blackberries of Common Prayer--or whatever the next gadget will be.

In this new age of the Internet you will need a double share of God's grace in order to wisely and effectively reach out to the world with the message of love and redemption of our Lord Jesus Christ. But be also aware that this new way of communication allows for lies and misinformation to complete a trip around the world before the truth is able to put on its shoes in the morning. With just a click of a mouse those without virtue, pretending to be orthodox, propose the Donatists' heresy, conspire to rob the patrimony of our church and predict with much gloom and doom the predetermined sad outcome they desire. It will require new skills and all the creativity that your generation can muster in order to quickly reach out to our people with the truth. The days in which we could rely on the snail mail and the diocesan newspaper as our only form of communication are long gone.

And I will pray that you may be granted a double portion of God's grace also to face the challenges we are encountering in our beloved America. Poverty has increased, the poor continue without medical care and our civil rights and freedom have decreased. Torture and the weakening of civil liberties are now something that America justifies in the name of homeland security, going to war seems almost routine, xenophobia and nativism are encouraged by racist TV anchors and greedy politicians--and to top it all, the encouragement of scientific research and finding ways to cure sickness take a back seat to fundamentalism and intolerance.

The Church has always been challenged, and always with God's grace we have confronted violence, discord, pride, confusion, ignorance and arrogance—ills that are prevalent in our society today. You will need a double portion of God's Grace to have the courage and wisdom to be a voice willing to defend our liberties, to preach peace, to remind all who will listen to "do justice, to love kindness and walk humbly with our God."

And while you are defending our liberties, save some strength to preserve the liberty of thought in our Church from those who strive to create outsiders. Our Church needs to continue being a magnet of hope and a welcoming inclusive harbor able to shelter all sorts and conditions of persons in the midst of the storms of life.

A few minutes ago you took an oath of conformity for the third time in your life as one of the ordained ministers of the Church. You have again declared your belief

in the Holy Scriptures as the Word of God and you have also solemnly engaged to conform to the doctrine, discipline, and worship of The Episcopal Church.

Sadly, in our time we have to face those who have betrayed their vows of ordination and consecration and in a dishonorable way now conspire to appropriate to themselves the patrimony of our Church. May you receive a double portion of God's grace to defend the Church from wolves wearing sheep's clothing.

Defend and protect your diocese, but also be a reconciler in our midst and try first to reconcile all opinions--and whenever you are unable to achieve that difficult task, then strive to reconcile the hearts of God's people in El Camino Real and the rest of the Church. Be the glue that keeps all sides together, fused to the Christ who is the center and reason of our existence.

I am aware that I have put a lot of emphasis on the challenges that bishops are facing in this new century, but I must tell you that when problems come your way you have to remember that it is for such times that bishops exist. The Holy Spirit inspired the Church to institute the office of bishop precisely because the people of God need the leadership of a wise shepherd in difficult times. Give thanks when the impossible comes your way, because that is what bishops are for.

You see, my dear, when the spring flowers are blooming and the cooling afternoon breezes delight everyone at our tropical beaches, probably very few think of bishops. But when hurricane forces are unleashed on our churches, destroying everything in their path, or when the solid earth that we take for granted begins to shake under our feet, it is then that being a bishop and having bishops surely make sense. We are like ships whose real purpose is not to look pretty in purple—though we actually do--while we rest at port, but to bear our people out into the world, regardless of the weather.

Mary, please stand.

Dare to have an episcopacy that will not devote its energy to preserving what is or has been, but will be committed to encouraging transformation.

I don't want you to doubt for a second that it is God's will for you to be a bishop. The Church, the bishops and the standing committees, have spoken, but most important, the *people* of El Camino Real have confirmed you in this task.

I ask you to guard the rich beauty of our Anglican heritage, but also to be willing to beckon to the challenges that tomorrow may bring.

I ask that you strive hard to make your diocese one that is firmly centered in Christ and the Biblical story, but one that also is always open to new learning and truth, balancing faith and reason, science and soul.

I ask you to guide your diocese with a sense of balance and depth of curiosity, being firm at the center, but open to a full freedom of inquiry.

I can assure you that God will give you all that you will ever need to fulfill your calling. Don't you ever doubt it, or be scared that God won't grant you a double share of his grace. Just strike with your crozier, having the faith of Elijah and Elisha, and the waters of any Jordans of El Camino Real will open for you. Whatever bumps and bruises that happen to come along the way are the part of your job description that was written in small print.

May you receive a double portion of God's grace--but be aware that a bishop with a double portion of God's grace is not expected to arrive at the pearly gates with a nicely preserved body, beautifully designed and well pressed vestments, or with a couple of million frequent flyer miles and a long list of all the boards, committees and commission meetings that you have faithfully attended.

Instead I pray for you to make your episcopacy such that when you get to the end of your earthly pilgrimage, you will skid in broadside and bump the pearly gates, arriving thoroughly used and totally worn out. Just pick yourself up and hand out your miter to Saint Peter and say: "Wow, what a wonderful ride!"

Bishop Mary, my dear, may you be granted a double share of God's grace.

Amen.