

Even Miracle Workers Have Their Bad Moments

This weekly bulletin insert complements the curriculum published by the Department of Christian Education of the Orthodox Church in America. This and many other Christian Education resources are available at <http://dce.oca.org>.

The prophet Elisha was the disciple and successor of another great prophet, Elijah. In his eagerness to serve God, Elisha performed many miracles. Often these wonderful acts benefited people's physical health as well as their spiritual well-being.

For example, the men of the city of Jericho complained to him that "the water is bad and the land is unfruitful." Elisha was able to purify the water, and as a true prophet he gave the credit and glory to God working through him: "Thus says the Lord, 'I have made this water wholesome; henceforth neither death nor miscarriage shall come from it' " (2 Kings 2: 21).

Another time, Elisha provided a stew made of herbs and wild gourds for a group of "sons of the prophets." Tasting it, the men cried out that there was "death in the pot." Elisha merely added some meal, and made the food harmless and tasty. When someone brought him twenty loaves of barley and some fresh grain, he instructed his servant to give it to the men. But the servant complained that it wasn't nearly enough to feed all 100 of them. Elisha calmly repeated his instructions, and again said the words the Lord had given him: "They shall eat and have some left" (2 Kings 4: 38-44). Sure enough, in a way similar to Jesus' feeding of the 5000, everyone was satisfied, and there were lots of leftovers.

When a widow cried out to him that creditors were about to enslave her children to pay the family's debts, Elisha offered practical but miraculous help. He instructed her to borrow containers from her neighbors, and then provided oil to fill every one. When there were no more containers, the oil stopped flowing, and Elisha told the woman to "sell the oil and pay your debts, and you and your sons can live on the rest" (2 Kings 4: 7).

One of Elisha's best-known miracles involved another woman in distress. The account of the Shunamite woman is given in 2 Kings 4: 8-37 and it is one of the fifteen Old Testament readings for Holy Saturday. Through Elisha's prayer, this hospitable woman is able to conceive a child. But a bad moment comes for the prophet when the child dies. She reproaches Elisha, and he says to his servant that "she is in bitter distress; and the Lord has hidden it from me, and has not told me." How helpless he must have felt, and perhaps momentarily abandoned by God. But by arduous prayer he is able to revive the child.

Elisha's mentor Elijah also had bad moments. Having killed Jezebel's prophets, he feared for his life and even "asked that he might die" rather than continue his prophetic work (1 Kings 19: 4).

When our own bad moments come, it's good to remember that we are not alone in having them, and that God will help us through them, just as He helped His miracle-working prophets.