

Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B Readings and Commentary

Celebration summary by Glenn CJ Byer, MA SLD: As we continue the season of the bread of life, we are presented with Elijah praying for death. But the message here, which is the message of the psalm and the Gospel, is that when God feeds, it is enough, for God gives us what we need for life. Elijah, by eating the food the angel provided made the mystical journey of redemption - 40 days, like 40 years in the desert for the people of Israel, 40 days and nights of rain for Noah, 40 days in the desert for Jesus - it is a period of completion, and at the end of all these journeys people are prepared to meet the Father and to do the will of God.

The Ephesians reading, chosen independently of the other readings is strangely related, focusing on the fruits of being in Christ. Anyone who is a follower of Jesus will have unity with Christ and unity with other disciples as the primary motivations of their life. This unity will move them to imitate Christ and to care for those in need. These behaviors are among the fruits of Communion.

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First Reading 1 Kings 19:4-8

Strengthened by that food, he walked to the mountain of God.

A reading from the first Book of Kings

Elijah went a day's journey into the desert,
until he came to a broom tree and sat beneath it.
He prayed for death saying:
"This is enough, O LORD!
Take my life, for I am no better than my fathers."
He lay down and fell asleep under the broom tree,
but then an angel touched him and ordered him to get up and eat.
Elijah looked and there at his head was a hearth cake
and a jug of water.
After he ate and drank, he lay down again,
but the angel of the LORD came back a second time,
touched him, and ordered,
"Get up and eat, else the journey will be too long for you!"
He got up, ate, and drank;
then strengthened by that food,
he walked forty days and forty nights to the mountain of God,
Horeb.

The word of the Lord

1 Kings 19:4-8 Commentary by Maribeth Howell, OP: This story of Elijah immediately follows the events on Mt. Carmel, where our prophet challenged the prophets of Baal and clearly demonstrated the power of the God of Israel. The opening verses of chapter 19, which are not part of today's first reading, continue to present the context within which we can best understand what is found in the Lectionary. Verses 1-3 state that king Ahab had told his wife, Jezebel, "all that Elijah had done." She responded by sending a message to Elijah: within twenty-four hours she would have him killed. Understandably, "Elijah was afraid and fled for his life."

Elijah went as far away as possible, far beyond the reach of Jezebel. After leaving his servant in Beer-sheba of Judah, which would have been "safe" territory, Elijah "went a day's journey into the desert," found a seat beneath a tree and prayed for death. He had obviously had it and was depleted of the desire or energy to go on. After falling asleep, an angel (interestingly, the Hebrew word for angel is the same that is used to refer to Jezebel's "messenger") instructed our prophet to eat, twice! He needs to eat because his mission is not over. "he got up, ate and drank; then strengthened by that food, he walked forty days and nights to the mountain of God, Horeb."

Since in the bible, forty days is often used to signify a "sufficient" period of time, we are led to believe that something more is about to happen to our prophet. The verses immediately following our reading tell the well-known story of Elijah's encounter with God.

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Second Reading Ephesians 4:30 - 5:2

Walk in love, just like Christ.

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Ephesians

Brothers and sisters:

Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God,
with which you were sealed for the day of redemption.
All bitterness, fury, anger, shouting, and reviling
must be removed from you, along with all malice.
And be kind to one another, compassionate,
forgiving one another as God has forgiven you in Christ.

So be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love,
as Christ loved us and handed himself over for us
as a sacrificial offering to God for a fragrant aroma.

The word of the Lord

Ephesians 4:30 - 5:2 Commentary by John Paul Heil: Main Theme: Live in the sacrificial LOVE with which the crucified CHRIST loved us. By our baptism into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ we have been "sealed," "marked," or "singled out" with the gift of the Holy Spirit of God for our eternal salvation on "the day of redemption." That we have been graciously given the Holy Spirit in baptism, then, "seals" or assures our redemption from the slavery of sin and entrance into eternal life. Our Christian lives must be in accord with this tremendous gift of salvation that we have been freely given. In our relations to one another, then, we are to avoid all bitterness, fury, anger, shouting, reviling, and malice. These are what lead to sinful violence against the other. Instead, we are to be kind, compassionate, and forgiving. But the motivation of our forgiving is all important--we are to forgive one another "as God has forgiven you in Christ." Our awareness of our need for and gift of God's forgiveness compels us to forgive one another.

Such forgiveness is the key to living in love as God's beloved children in imitation of God himself. But such forgiveness for and humbly bearing with the faults and failings of others often entails our sacrificial service for the other. That is where the crucified Christ is our inspiration--"Christ loved us and handed himself over for us as a sacrificial offering to God for a fragrant aroma."

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Gospel John 6:41-51

I am the living bread that came down from heaven.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John

The Jews murmured about Jesus because he said,
"I am the bread that came down from heaven,"
and they said,
"Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph?
Do we not know his father and mother?
Then how can he say,
'I have come down from heaven'?"

Jesus answered and said to them,
"Stop murmuring among yourselves.
No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him,
and I will raise him on the last day.
It is written in the prophets:
They shall all be taught by God.
Everyone who listens to my Father and learns from him comes to me.
Not that anyone has seen the Father
except the one who is from God;
he has seen the Father.
Amen, amen, I say to you,
whoever believes has eternal life.
I am the bread of life.
Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert, but they died;
this is the bread that comes down from heaven
so that one may eat it and not die.
I am the living bread that came down from heaven;
whoever eats this bread will live forever;
and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world."

The Gospel of the Lord

John 6:41-51 Commentary by Deacon Owen Cummings: The gospel readings have been taken and will continue to be taken from the sixth chapter of St. John from the Seventeenth Sunday until the Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time. Why is this? Who does the Church interrupt, as it were, the continuous reading of St. Mark in this way? The only reason that makes sense is to emphasize yet again the inassimilable mystery of the Eucharist through which we are drawn into the life of God as Communion. The words of John 6 are overwhelming. The Church uses these words like a mantra. Think of some of them. The Wisdom/Word of God has come down from heaven into our midst (John 1.14). He is the bread of life, his flesh gives life to the world. Those who eat this bread/flesh will live forever. How could one possibly assimilate this truth? If we fall back on some words of Meister Eckhart to the effect that there is no point to celebrating the Incarnation of the Word unless the Word is coming to incarnation in us, then we have the essence of this gospel message. Through the Eucharist the Wisdom/Word of God is indeed incarnating in us. By God's desire, will and grace we are being sanctified, divinized. It is literally amazing. Pope John Paul II in his encyclical letter, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, "Church from the Eucharist," speaks of wishing "to rekindle this eucharistic 'amazement'" (par. 6). These lazy summer

Sundays are the occasion used by the Church to rekindle our ongoing amazement about what is happening to us through the Eucharist.

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