

## **Nineteenth Sunday of the Year August 09, 2015**

1 Kings 19:4-8; Ephesians 4:30-5:2; John 6:41-51

Our Christian faith is based on the personal love of God towards each one of us. Through faith wonders have been carried out throughout the ages. Thanks to faith we ourselves believe in the divine presence and in his providential care. But true faith is nothing without love. It is love which is the driving force of faith; it is love which pushes the men and women living on this earth to believe, with all their heart, in God the Father who is in Heaven. Faith and love do good work: together, they lead man towards God, towards that food which is the Word of God. Faith and love are the means which make it possible for man to receive within him the life which belongs to the Word of Life, the very Life of God: "He who believes has eternal life." However, even if faith makes it possible for love to live eternally, it is only a beginning of eternity which is given to the man who loves God: for faith is a trial which lasts until the end of a man's life on earth, a trial which one must undergo, a trial one must endure to the end, with perseverance. A strong faith supported by the Love of God, gives man the power to not die in eternity, but remain ever united with God. The object of this faith and love is the Eucharist, the bread of eternal life which Jesus gives us for our nourishment. In today's Gospel Jesus tells us that he is the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. In the second reading we are reminded that the Holy Spirit has entered lives through Baptism. With the Spirit's help we can even imitate God and live a life of love. In the first reading Prophet Elijah feels that he has come to the end of his mission while God has special plans for him.

The first Reading taken from the First Book of Kings, tells us of the care given by God to his faithful prophet Elijah as he moved into the wilderness. He felt powerless before Queen Jezebel and prayed to God to take away his life. Elijah had gone a day's journey into the wilderness and he was tired. Symbolically, his journey into the wilderness can be perceived as someone who is aimlessly wondering on earth. He does not know why he is living, a life without hope and destiny. In the midst of opposition it seemed as if all was lost for him. In desperation and exhaustion Elijah sat under a solitary broom tree and prayed to God that he may die. He had enough of life, realizing that he was no better than his ancestors. He complained to God that Israel has abandoned God. Indeed he had lost all hope and found no purpose in life. He then slept under the tree. However, God refused to grant Elijah's prayer for death and instead gave him nourishment for life. That was the moment of grace for him. At that moment an angel touched Elijah and told him to eat the cake baked on hot stones and to drink from the jar of water and Elijah obeyed. Having eaten the meal Elijah returned to sleep. A second time, the angel touched him and woke him up and gave him food and he was called upon to walk forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mountain of God. The bread and water was the food he received from the Almighty to direct him to his destiny.

In the Second Reading Paul tells the Ephesian Christian Community not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God with which they were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. He informed them that God or Jesus or the Holy Spirit strictly speaking cannot be upset by what they do. But it is surely the will of God, expressed by Jesus and prompted in them by the Spirit that their lives must remain lives of love. Paul invited them to put away from their hearts all bitterness and anger and quarrelling and slanderous language, together with all malice. He advised them to be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven them. Only when a Christian lived a life of love, of forgiveness, of reconciliation, totally free of violence and full of caring, they would be able to say that as a community they have truly eaten of the Bread of Life. When such a wide-ranging love

becomes the dominant pattern of their living it becomes a convincing evidence of being transformed by the Bread of Life. Jesus is the Son of God and is the perfect image of the Father. Because we are all God's children in Christ we can also become imitators of God. We can love God because Christ loved us and sacrificed himself for us. That is why Jesus gave us the command to love one another, as he himself has loved us and his love is eternal.

Today's Gospel reading is the continuation of the sixth chapter of John's gospel on the theme of Jesus the Bread of Life. The passage begins with the murmuring of the Jews. This response of the Jews was very similar to the incident in the desert where the Israelites grumbled against Moses and God and refused to accept their mission. Yet God is generous and gave them Manna in spite of their grumbling. In the New Testament we have Jesus who has much more to offer and was offering something unique, namely his own body and blood. Even then when Jesus told the Jews that he is the living bread that has come down from heaven and they have to listen to him and believe in him, they started grumbling and complaining. They particularly objected to the words 'from heaven'. Jesus stressed the word living indicating the growth and their need to be one with him. Jesus strongly emphasized the fact that He and the Bread of Life are one and the same. Here the Jews murmured about Jesus because he said that he was the bread of life that has come down from heaven. They counter that the claim of Jesus is fraudulent because they knew his parents, the place where he came from and not certainly from heaven. Like the people of Nazareth, they showed extra familiarity with him. They knew him as Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother they knew too well. How then could he say that he has come down from heaven? They found it difficult to accept him. They knew who Jesus was from the human point of view, namely a carpenter from Galilee. In fact, they could not understand the reality of Jesus the incarnation of God among them.

The Gospel gives us the precious message that Jesus is the bread of life. Here we heard the prophetic words of Jesus when he told them that he is the Living Bread that came down from Heaven. Through these words, Jesus was preparing the believers for the institution of the Eucharist which is his special gift to the Church. This living bread will sustain us and nourish us with its strength on our life's journey. The crowd, not long before was so eager to eat the bread in the wilderness, now started grumbling and refusing to accept his teachings. Once again John brings here his method of misunderstanding and later correcting the mystery. They were hearing only his literal words and could not understand what they really meant. It requires faith go beyond the surface level and grasp what Jesus is saying at a deeper level. In fact Jesus was telling them that he was the bread of kindness, of tenderness, of forgiveness. He was and will continue to be the bread of love, of loving, and of being loved, the bread of self-sacrifice and self-giving. They only have to eat of this bread and they will find the strength to live, courage to continue, and the will to be like him, to be one with him. He is the one who chooses to live with his people and become the daily bread of life.

To understand Jesus it is necessary to have faith and the attraction of the Father. Hence Jesus proclaims to the Jews that only those who have been drawn by God can come to Jesus and believe in him. It is this belief that will raise them up on the last day. The question remains, how a person is "drawn" by the Father and how one can reach Jesus. The word draw is a special word in the Bible and used delicately. It is like the magnetic pull a total attraction to the person one chooses to love. The implication is that God has to provide the initiative and the person has to be open to that. Being able to accept and believe in Jesus cannot be attained without the divine initiative. We are drawn to Jesus through the indwelling Spirit of Truth who teaches us and guides us. This is possible by hearing the Father's voice and learning

from him. Jesus promises that all those who have heard and learned from the Father come to him. Not that anyone has seen the Father except him who is from God and Jesus who is from God have seen the Father. This happens by our coming freely and unconditionally to the heart of Jesus. To learn from the Father in practice is to hear and believe the message of Jesus. This is because no one has seen the Father except Jesus. It is only through Jesus are we taught and drawn by the Father. Jesus is the sole interpreter of the Father. Once again Jesus emphasizes the same word and says, "I AM the Bread of Life." Looking at the people doubting in his words and teaching and continuing from what the people told him earlier, Jesus told them that their ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness and they died. But Jesus wanted to give them different type of bread that has come down from Heaven, that is, from God. When a person eats this Bread he will not die but will live forever. That is the new life which Jesus gives us.

The Jews in fact clearly understood the meaning of this bread. When bread was offered in the temples to the deity, it was understood that it became part of the divinity. This bread was then given back to the people to share and eat as their nourishment and the people believed that they took part in the very divine person and it became their food. When Jesus said I am the bread of life and called them to eat him, it was a direct invitation from him to believe in his divinity. In our Christian context it is an anticipation of the words of Jesus at the Last Supper when he said over the bread, "This is my Body which will be delivered over, handed over for you." It is a call to participate in his divinity. This Bread of Life that Jesus gives from his Father can be summed up in one word: Love. Therefore Jesus solemnly declares that whoever believes in him will have eternal life. Believers will now be able to live in the unending presence of God. Jesus connects the manna of the desert with his own feeding of the five thousand in the desert. The manna was able to satisfy their human hunger but would not give them the eternal life. But the bread of life Jesus offers surpasses the manna because it can provide eternal life. The final move was that Jesus boldly proclaims that he is the bread of life and he will give his flesh for the life of the world. He did this on the cross when he offered his own body and blood and his resurrection fulfilled this sign of his giving. That flesh which was offered up in love and died on the cross is the key to life. We eat that bread by absorbing into ourselves the spirit, the truth and integrity, the love and compassion, the generosity and peacefulness of Jesus.

In the Gospel of today Jesus goes on to foretell the Eucharist. Jesus tells the people that he is the bread of life and is going to be the food of the believers. Here the reality of the mystery is presented fewer than two different aspects. The first aspect consists in saying that this food is the Body of Christ; the second aspect, that the Body of Jesus is this food. Those who believe in the teachings of Jesus, who persevere in their living faith, and who receive the Church Sacraments, they are on their way to eternal life in the Kingdom of God. Jesus promises that those who believe in him will be fed by the spiritual food which is his own body and blood. The Jews with their religious beliefs found it hard and could not accept the claims of Jesus that he was more than a Prophet. The Eucharist that he gives us is the sacrificial meal which he offered on the cross for our sake and for the sake of humanity which is an offering and the same time a gift. Today we ask the grace from Jesus that our Eucharistic celebrations may become truly an experience which helps us to be transformed into a community of love. We need to become a people reaching out in love to all those in need around us. We ourselves, as living members of the Body of Christ, must ourselves become life-giving Bread for others. Our Eucharist, then, becomes first a celebration of what we are a loving people and secondly become a force in our lives to love even more. Just as prophet Elijah went for 40 days and 40 nights on the strength of the bread God gave him, we too may travel on our life's journey with the strength of the Eucharist.

The Temple was built on an island and it held a thousand bells. Bells, big and small fashioned by the finest craftsmen in the world were placed in the Temple. When the wind blew of a storm raged, all the bells would peal out in a symphony that would send the heart of the hearer into raptures. But over the centuries the island sank into the sea and, with it, the temple bells. An ancient legend said that the bells continued to peal out, ceaselessly, and could be heard by anyone who would listen. Inspired by this legend, a young man travelled thousands of miles, determined to hear those bells. He sat for days on the shore, facing the vanished island, and listened with all his might. But all he could hear was the sound of the sea. He made every effort to block it out but without success. He kept at his task for weeks. Each time he got disheartened he would listen to the village people who spoke with uncton of the mysterious legend. Then his heart would be aflame... only to become discouraged again when weeks of further effort yielded no results. Finally he decided to give up the attempt. Perhaps he was not destined to hear the bells. Perhaps the legend was not true. It was his final day, and he went to the shore to say goodbye to the sea and the sky and the wind and all the trees. He lay on the sand, and for the first time, listened to the sound of the sea. Soon he was so lost in the sound that he was barely conscious of himself, so deep was the silence that the sound produced. In the depth of that silence, he heard it: the tinkle of a tiny bell followed by another, and another, and another. And soon every one of the thousand temple bells was pealing out in harmony, and his heart was filled with joyous ecstasy.

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