

FR. JOHN'S HOMILY

Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, August 8, 2021

As humans we have many hungers. Yes, we hunger for food, but there are other hungers like love, purpose, meaning, acceptance, belongings, etc. Food we need for our physical body. However food cannot take care of our other hungers. There is no amount of food, drink, material things, or people that can quench the hunger and thirst we carry within us. It is like what St. Augustine says, *"Our hearts are restless until they rest in you, O Lord."*

Even in the Lord's Prayer, the Our Father, Jesus asked us to pray *"Give us this day our daily bread"*. Jesus was not just talking about our physical foods. Jesus is also talking about the daily bread that satisfies our spiritual hungers; Jesus is our Daily Bread.

The sadness today is that people continue to seek meaning and fulfillment in their lives by all these other means which will never be met. Without God, without Jesus, this will never happen. They get caught in the trap of wanting more and more, which are all empty promises. It reminds me of a famous country song from back in 1980's, ***"Looking For Love in All The Wrong Places"***. Many are still searching for love in the wrong things, wrong people, and wrong places.

We have the right place and the right person today; His name is Jesus. And Jesus and only Jesus can satisfy these hungers within us. As Christians we are called to enter into this love that satisfies all human hungers. Then, as we receive, we are called to love and share God's love to help satisfy this deep hunger that others are searching for. Christ's mission was to reveal God's love; the only love that can truly satisfy. When we think about it, we have the answers for what others are searching for - we have the key and we have the remedy, we have Jesus.

In the First Reading from Kings, we have Elijah hungering for something very strange - death. The reading begins: Elijah went a day's journey into the desert, until he came to a broom tree and sat beneath it. As the name of the tree indicates, it does not provide much shade, but some relief from the desert sun. Why is he running? He just put all of the queen's prophets to shame and had them killed. The queen, being upset, sent her army to kill him. So he is running for his life. He is a great prophet and man of faith, but here he is praying for death which he is running from. But listen to his prayer: *"This is enough, O Lord! Take my life, for I am no better than my fathers"*. At times maybe we feel like Elijah, better for our lives to end, than to continue in the misery we are facing.

There are times we get desperate, and call out to God like Elijah. We all experience bad times at various different points in our lives. Maybe to the point that all we can do is collapse on our own desert floor. But we can't let it end there, we have to keep praying.

In prayer we need to be as honest to God as Elijah's prayer. Elijah doesn't mince words with God about how he feels. He simply tells God exactly what he is feeling, even when he is at one of the lowest times in his life. Even during the worst times in his life, he keeps his heart open to God and therefore keeps himself open to God's grace.

What was God's answer for Elijah? As he slept, 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.

At one moment Elijah was hungering for death, the next he eats the food from heaven and has strength to carry on! Then strengthened by that food, he found the strength to carry on. This is the Eucharist for us, the eternal food that strengthens us for the Journey.

We have been exploring the 6th Chapter of the Gospel of Saint John these past few weeks. It is John's account of the multiplication of the fish and loaves and the Bread of Life Discourse. Jesus is the true Bread come down from Heaven, He is the food of everlasting life.

John 6, picks up with the Jews not understanding Jesus. And we hear that they murmur - complaining. It's different than what Elijah did. Elijah was expressing his heart towards God, the Israelites and Jews in the Gospel, complaining is center on themselves. The Jews murmured about Jesus because He said, "*I am the bread that came down from heaven.*" The only other place we hear of the Jews murmuring is in Exodus Chapter 16. In Exodus 16, it says, "*Here in the desert the whole Israelite community murmured against Moses and Aaron. The Israelites said to them, 'Would that we had died at the Lord's hand in the land of Egypt, as we sat by our fleshpots and ate our fill of bread! But you had to lead us into this desert to make the whole community die of famine!'*" Their collapse on the desert floor left them complaining. What was the Lord's answer to Moses and Aaron? "*I will rain down bread from heaven for you*".

As we look at Exodus, Elijah, in the Gospel when hear something very similar - a lot of restless hearts. God answered Elijah's prayer with food for the journey. God answered the Hebrews cries with manna and water in the desert. God does provide the food they need to carry on in their journey. God provides now for us.

Have we learned to live on every word that comes from the mouth of God? Do we still hunger and thirst for things that will not satisfy? Are we still searching for love in all the wrong places? Are our hearts restless?

God is our food and drink that satisfies all our needs. Jesus says, "*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."

Those who give themselves to Jesus understand this, like our saints. Listen to St. Ignatius of Antioch, who was martyred in 107, "*I hunger for the bread of God, the flesh of Jesus Christ ...; I long to drink of his blood, the gift of unending love.*"