

Gratitude Foundation



*“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”*

(Lk. 17:15-17)

The Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time—Year B

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“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”

(1 Thess: 5:18)

Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading 1

1 Kings 19:4-8

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.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 34:2-3, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9

R. (9a) Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

I will bless the LORD at all times;
his praise shall be ever in my mouth.
Let my soul glory in the LORD;
the lowly will hear me and be glad.

R. Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

Glorify the LORD with me,
Let us together extol his name.
I sought the LORD, and he answered me
And delivered me from all my fears.

R. Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

Look to him that you may be radiant with joy.
And your faces may not blush with shame.
When the afflicted man called out, the LORD heard,
And from all his distress he saved him.

R. Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

The angel of the LORD encamps
around those who fear him and delivers them.
Taste and see how good the LORD is;
blessed the man who takes refuge in him.
R. Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

Reading 2

Ephesians 4:30—5:2

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.

Alleluia

John 6:51

R. Alleluia, alleluia.
I am the living bread that came down from heaven, says the Lord;
whoever eats this bread will live forever.
R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

John 6:41-51

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."

Exegesis

1 Kings 19:4-8

Elijah was an active prophet in Israel during the reigns of Ahab (874-853) and Ahaziah (853-852). Ahab married Jezebel in Samaria. She was a daughter of the king of the Sidonians. Jezebel in her role as queen built a temple to worship the pagan God Baal. The infidelity of the Israelite people to their covenant relationship with Yahweh was rampant. The worship of the fertility god Baal was very attractive, religious rites included free-flowing wine and sexual promiscuity. Worshipping Baal was also politically expedient as it put one in good favor with Queen Jezebel.

Jezebel was seeking to silence the prophets of Yahweh by murdering them; such that Elijah claimed to be the only prophet of Yahweh remaining. In a desperate effort Elijah challenged 450 prophets of Baal to a contest to pit Baal against Yahweh. That challenge unfolds in the 18th Chapter of 1 Kings. Both sides were to prepare an altar of sacrifice and call on their god to rain down fire to consume the sacrifice. The prophets of Baal went first and were not able to ignite the altar. After hours of intense prayer and ritual the prophets of Baal were unsuccessful. Elijah had his servants drench the wood of the altar with water three times. Then he called upon Yahweh and “The Lord’s fire came down and consumed the holocaust, wood, stones and dust, and it lapped up the water in the trench.” (1 Kgs 18:38). The prophets of Baal were subsequently killed at Kishon.

Subsequently, Elijah climbed Mt. Carmel and prayed for rain to end the drought that had devastated the country. The hand of the Lord was on Elijah; God answered his prayers and provided heavy rains. Following these mighty works of Yahweh, Ahab returned to Jezebel and recounted all that had happened. Jezebel in retaliation sought to put Elijah to death.

The scene of our first reading is Elijah’s retreat into the desert to save his life from his pursuers. Ironically, Elijah seems to be at the end of his strength and asks that God take his life. An angel appeared to Elijah with food and drink and encouraged him to continue his journey. The destination of the journey is not mentioned, but it seems to be known; it is the mountain of God Horeb, forty days journey through the desert. Elijah seeks the Lord, who is not in the mighty wind, the earthquake or the fire, but is in the silence of a tiny whisper.

It is hard not to draw a parallel with the theophany that Elijah experienced on Mt. Horeb with the theophany of Moses centuries earlier on Mt. Horeb, the Mountain of God. (See Exod. 3-4; 33:15-34:8). God revealed Himself in the burning bush that was not consumed. God revealed Himself as I AM (*Ehyeh asher ehyeh*). God instructed Moses that He would rescue His people from bondage in Egypt. On that same spot God would later establish His covenant with the people as He gave them the Ten Commandments. It was also a time of infidelity as the people were worshipping the golden calf, the image of Baal. It is also significant that it was Moses and Elijah who would later be present during the great theophany of the Transfiguration.

Now Elijah returns to the same place complaining to God of the infidelity of the people. God informs Elijah that seven thousand men had remained faithful, had not knelt to Baal. He encouraged Elijah to return for them and to appoint Elisha as his successor.

The focus of our pericope today is the miraculous food and water that is provided to Elijah to provide strength for his journey to the Mountain of God, Horeb. The journey through the desert is paradigmatic of our journey through this life to the Promised Land, Heaven. Just as God provided manna in the desert, just as God provided bread for Elijah’s journey, so Jesus is Bread of Life for our journey.

Exegesis (Continued)

Psalm 34:2-3, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9

Psalm 34 is an individual song of thanksgiving. It is titled *Thanksgiving to God Who Delivers the Just*. “Taste and see how good the Lord is.” Some translations read *savor* how good the Lord is. God wants us to experience His love and goodness. The Lord is Emmanuel, God with us. In Jesus, Emmanuel, God is in solidarity with us. He is with us on this journey through life. He is not always in the wind, fire and earthquakes but in the intimate whispers and the silence of our hearts. God wants to experience, taste and savor His grace and mercy. No where on earth is the gift of God more real, more substantial, more personal than on the Altar of Sacrifice, the Eucharist.

Ephesians 4:30—5:2

Chapter 4 of *Ephesians* is a call to unity in the Spirit, unity in Christ. The author is talking directly to the community at Ephesus, but it is a call to unity among all Christians. We are all baptized into One Lord, One Spirit. Our pericope today is under the title *Daily Conduct, An Expression of Unity, Rules for the New Life*. We are called to “live in love.” God is love and there is a chain of love that flows from the Father through the Son in the form of the Holy Spirit. We are all baptized into this chain of love. We are called to live in this chain of love, life, light, goodness, mercy and grace. To live in this chain looks like something. It has a form. That form is Christ. Just as each of us is called to be a living temple of the Holy Spirit, together we form a larger living temple in which the Holy Spirit dwells. Together we become the living Body of Christ here on earth.

John 6:41-51

The word *murmuring* recalls the murmuring of the Israelites in the desert. The people were murmuring against God and Moses because they were dying of hunger and thirst. Murmuring often connotes a lack of faith or a lack of understanding. For example, referencing this time in the desert, Psalm 106:26-25 states, “Next, they despised the beautiful land; they did not believe the promise. In their tents they complained (murmured); they did not obey the Lord.” In spite of or perhaps in response to their murmuring and Moses’ pleas God did provide water from the rock to quench their thirst and quail and manna to fill their hunger. Despite their murmuring, their lack of faith, Jesus is the Bread of Life.

Murmuring can also imply a sense of rebellion. The crowd begins to rebel against Jesus as He becomes all too much for them. They know Him as the son of Joseph and Mary and now He claims to be the one who has come down from heaven. Their complaints are against Jesus. Are they in reality rebelling against God? Moses had warned the murmuring people of Israel, “Your complaints are not against us, but against the Lord” (Exod 16:8). Jesus repeats this process as He reproaches the murmuring of the “Jews” (v. 43) by pointing to the Father, and explaining His role in terms of His origins with the Father. The Father sends Jesus, the Father draws believers to Him, and the response of those drawn to the revelation of the Father in the Sent One will be the measure of their everlasting life.¹

Jesus tells us that all people will be taught by God citing Isaiah 54:16, “All your sons shall be taught by the Lord.” Jesus now claims that in fulfillment of the prophetic promise (v. 45a) a process is in motion that leads to the true believer’s coming to Jesus. No longer is Israel the object and the Law the source of God’s instruction. It is aimed at all believers without limitation of race or nation, and it comes through Jesus.²

Exegesis (Continued)

John 6:41-51

Jesus is the one who has seen the Father. Moses heard the voice of God. What he saw was a burning bush that was not consumed. St John writes in the beautiful prologue of his gospel, “In the beginning was the Word, and Word was with God...” The word(s) that we translate as *with*, mean literally *face-to-face* with God. The Word was face-to-face with the Father. In the mystery of the Trinity the Word is both God and face-to-face with the Father in a bond of love that we call the Holy Spirit. Jesus is clearly revealing Himself as God.

“Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life.” These words of Jesus capture the heart of John’s Gospel. Similarly, the famous oft-quoted verse 3:16, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, so that those who believe in Him might not perish but might have eternal life,” also summarize his gospel. Both verses are direct quotes from Jesus, Himself. Jesus tells us clearly, belief, *pistos*, is necessary for eternal life. Faith or belief, as it comes to be defined by Sacred Scripture, is more than a system of beliefs that we hold or a creed that we profess and is even more than a way of life. It is about remaining in Christ, remaining in the chain of love that flows from the Father through Jesus. As such, it is about the present moment. It is not a future promise, but an ever-present reality. Jesus uses words like *has* or *have* when speaking of eternal life. He is telling us that it is something that we must possess in the here and now. Because God is the source of this life (*zoe*) it is forever for those who “remain in My love.”

Moses once pointed to the manna and told the people, “This is the bread which the Lord has given you to eat.” (Exod 16:15). Jesus says, “I Am the bread of life... I AM the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever...” The journey of the Israelite people out of slavery, through the desert, to the Promised Land is a paradigm for our journey through this life to heaven. Manna from heaven is similarly a symbol of the Holy Eucharist, our food for the journey. Our ancestors ate manna and still died. When we eat of the True Bread from heaven, Jesus, we will live forever because He is the living bread. He is God, He is divine life that came down from heaven and is given to us. It is a gift that must be received and so we say AMEN. Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

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1. Moloney, Harrington; Sacra Pagina Series; The Gospel of John; L.P.; MN; page 217.
 2. Ibid.; page 219.

Reflection

This weekend we continue to read from the beautiful *Bread of Life* discourse taken from the 6th chapter of St. John's Gospel. The Eucharist is the center of John's Gospel, the center of our liturgical year and the center of our faith. It should also be at the center of our lives. It is the center of my life and has been for years.

Jesus proclaims quite emphatically, "Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life." So, what does it mean to believe? That is the question we should be asking, because it is clear that our eternal life depends on it. Faith is more than a creed that we recite. It is more than a system of beliefs that we hold to. It is a way of living. Faith means living our lives connected to the source of all life, of all being. No where on earth is this connection more real, more substantial and more tangible than on the altar as we celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

If we claim to believe in Jesus as the eternal Word made flesh, if we believe that He is the eternal Word through whom everything came into being, then we must believe in what He said and taught, and we must respond to His commands. How can people claim to believe in Jesus and then not follow His commands and believe what He taught is true? The teaching of Jesus cannot be clearer relative to the gift of Himself in the Holy Eucharist. His command is also clear and direct, "Do this in memory of Me."

At its deepest level, love is the sharing of life. God so loved the world that He gives His life to us. This gift of life is an ongoing reality. God is the creator of all that is, and the sustainer of all life. The imagery of bread is that of sustenance for life. In our first reading from the first Book of Kings, Elijah is given bread from heaven to give him strength for his journey to the mountain of God, Horeb. The bread is food for the journey. In a similar way the Israelite people were given bread from heaven that they called manna as they journeyed through the desert on their journey to the Promised Land. In His infinite plan God also showers us with food for our journey through this life, and we call it Eucharist.

The angel commands Elijah to eat the bread, "Get up and eat, else the journey will be too long for you." In other words, unless you eat this bread you will not make it to the mountain of God. The Israelites were dying of hunger in the desert and God gave them food so that they would be able to complete the journey to the Promised Land. Jesus says, "Unless you eat My body and drink My blood you will not have eternal life."

Jesus established His Church on the foundation of St. Peter to be the perpetual source of His life pouring out for us. All we must do is respond with faith. All we must do is receive the gift. All we must do is become the gift. In the words of St. Augustine, "Become what you receive, the Body of Christ." When we do that, we fulfill our calling and eternal life is ours to have and possess for eternity. Come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of us Your faithful and enkindle in us the fire of Your love. Amen.

In Jesus and Mother Mary,



Personal Witness

In my early and mid-thirties, I was working as a Certified Public Accountant. I was in the early stages of my career. I was a very driven person who rather quickly became a workaholic. There was something missing in my life, and I did not know what it was; it was a hunger and thirst for God. but I didn't recognize it at the time. After the tragic and untimely death of one of my best friends I went searching for meaning and purpose. I began to read all the books that I could find on faith and spirituality. My parish priest introduced me to the writings of a Jesuit priest, Fr. John Powell. One of his books was titled *Fully Human, Fully Alive*. One line struck me very profoundly, He wrote "Fear not that you might die, fear that you may never really live." I realized that I was not really living, but existing and going through the motions of life.

The next step in my spiritual journey was to return to reading Sacred Scripture, especially the Gospel and the Letters of St. John. I was attracted to the sayings of Jesus on the fullness or abundant life and on life eternal. For my entire life I looked at the vision of eternal life as the hope of life after death as I am sure many people do. It struck me that that is not how Jesus talked about eternal life. The famous oft quoted verse John 3:16, for example, is a direct quote from Jesus, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, so that those who believe in Him might not perish but might have eternal life." My favorite scripture verse is John 10:10, where Jesus says, "I came so that you might have life and have life more abundantly." In the famous *Bread of Life Discourse*, Jesus says, "Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life." In all the aforementioned words of Jesus, He is speaking of eternal life as a present reality that we might have or possess in the here and now!

The Greek word for life is *zoe* which is distinguished from *bios*, the word used for biological life. *Zoe* describes more of spiritual life of which the breath of God is the source. Because God is the source of this life, it is eternal. The Greek word that we translate as "eternal" is *aionios*. *Aionios* has as much of a qualitative as well as a quantitative connotation. It is independent of time. The fact that God is outside of time is hard for us to conceptualize as we live in time and space. Again, the Greek language is more precise in the description of time. The word *kyros* describes time as the eternal present moment, while *chronos* speaks of chronological time as we typically think of time. All too often we live stuck, wounded by hurts from our past and an inability to forgive, and troubled with anxiety for the future; and so, we never really live in the moment.

Jesus is calling us to live life to the fullest in the present moment. We do that by living in Him and allowing Him to live in us. It is the indwelling presence that He promised us at the Last Supper. To live to the full means to live in this chain of life and of love that flows from the Father in and through Jesus. He is the Bread of Life that has come down from heaven. Jesus established His Church on the Rock of St. Peter to be the perpetual font of this life and love that flows from the altar and through the Sacraments of His Church.

St. Paul reminds us that "Eternal life has already begun in us but is not yet complete." Eternal life is about life after biological death, but it begins in the here and now. Now is the time to open our minds, our hearts and our souls to accept the gift of life, life to the fullest, the abundant life, life eternal.

