

Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – August 8, 2021 – Good Shepherd Parish

Scripture Reading: 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.

Psalm: Ps 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.

Scripture Reading: 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.

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."

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INVITATION TO PRAY

Pause for a few moments of silence and enter more deeply into the presence of God.

Proclaim the Scriptures out loud.

As you listen to the scriptures be attentive to a word, a phrase, a question, an image, or a feeling that emerges. Reflect on this quietly or share it aloud.

INVITATION TO REFLECT

The background: Elijah had just come from a dangerous showdown with 450 prophets of a god called Baal, in the land ruled by Jezebel. The God of Israel had easily won this encounter, but Elijah had gone ahead and done great violence against the surviving prophets anyway. Queen Jezebel, understandably enraged, sent a message that she would do the same thing to Elijah and more within that same day. In our First Reading Elijah was frightened, exhausted and dispirited. He had come back to find the Israelites being unfaithful to the one true God. So he became miserable—in spite of his great triumph. He prayed to God to give immediate death to his worthless self. As despondent people will sometimes do, he went to sleep. He lay himself under a broom tree (a tall hedge that desert people used to shield themselves from the sun in the day and the wind at night). God could have been harsh to Elijah as a result of this depressed prayer. But instead, a quiet touch from God's angel awakened the man. The angel whispered, "get up and eat." And, lo and behold, "there at his head was a hearth cake and a jug of water." Elijah did eat and drink, but then settled right back to sleep again. The angel whispered tenderly, "Get up and eat, else the journey will be too long for you!" Elijah did and was strengthened. We are witnessing a mother's care, giving food to the discouraged child (First Reading).

The other readings too are all about God's kindness, his goodness even in small things. The Responsorial Psalm invites us to share in it: "Taste and see the goodness of the Lord. . . . I sought the Lord, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears." In the Gospel, Jesus offers nourishment, and this time the provisions are for a very long journey indeed, the one to eternal life. The people listening (called by John "the Jews," but really just "the sensible people") will not have a bit of it. They argue among themselves, ridiculing his silly offer of miraculous food. They "murmur" that they knew his parents, which made him just a local boy acting crazy. Jesus ordered them to stop grousing and listen. He made the same comparison that we saw last week, between manna that came down from heaven in the desert, and himself, who was "the living bread that came down from heaven." Just concentrate on the deliberate kindness of God: feeding the people, giving them drink, pursuing them again and again in order to offer the greatest gift of all, God's sacrificial love for us. God follows us quietly, gently. How might we respond? To start with, how about receiving the living bread in Communion? Another way could be to pray on the mellowness of God. Also, simply slowing down, stopping the running away and instead letting the Lord find us. God's kindhearted love, which is also tough, proves to be quite worth the struggle. Here is how Paul puts it in the Second Reading. 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.

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

1. In this reading, sometimes we are Elijah and sometimes we are the hearth cake. Think of times in your life when you wanted to cry, "enough" and you could have used some help from somewhere. Did help come? How?
2. Do you think you could get better at "being an imitator of God?" How? Is it more likely to happen all at once because you want it to, or a little at a time because you work at letting God into you? If you were going to try for this, where would you start?
3. The crowd murmured when Jesus said he was the bread that came down from heaven. They knew his mother and father: how did this impact their willingness to believe him? Is it easy to accept a "prophet" [one who speaks for God] in your own circle of acquaintances? Explain.

INVITATION TO ACT

Determine a specific action (individual or group) that flows from your sharing. When choosing an individual action, determine what you will do and share it with the group. When choosing a group action, determine who will take responsibility for different aspects of the action. These should be your primary considerations.

CLOSING INVITATION TO PRAY

Give thanks to God (aloud or silently) for new insights, for desires awakened, for directions clarified, for the gift of one another's openness and sensitivity. Conclude with the following:

Almighty ever-living God, whom, taught by the Holy Spirit, we dare to call our Father, bring, we pray, to perfection in our hearts the spirit of adoption as your sons and daughters, that we may merit to enter into the inheritance which you have promised. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen

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Prayer to St. Michael

St. Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle. Be our defense against the wickedness and snares of the Devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray, and do thou, O Prince of the heavenly hosts, by the power of God, thrust into hell Satan, and all the evil spirits, who prowl about the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen