

Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – August 12, 2018

Our Lady of Perpetual Help

First Reading: 1 KGS 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: 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.

Second Reading: EPH 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: JN 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

“It’s scandalous!” You can almost hear the whispered incredulity spread throughout the crowd. Looks of dismay and shock are interspersed by the flashing angry eyes of indignation. In their murmuring you can almost hear them asking, “How could one seemingly so good, doing such miracles and works of mercy, expound such blasphemous remarks?” Their murmuring was not unlike that of their Israelite ancestors in the wilderness when they too expressed their ingratitude by judging the ways of God’s salvation.

The responses of the Jews, and of the multitude of disciples who turned away from Jesus to no longer follow him, provide a commentary on the meaning of Jesus’ remarks in John 6. The scandal, in their minds, was that Jesus claimed to have previously been with God the Father in heaven. Since no man has seen God at any time, or could survive being in the Father’s presence, Jesus’ claim to have been with the Father, and to have spoken directly to him, put Jesus on a par with the great I AM of the Old Testament. Jesus further scandalized these Jewish minds by claiming that, “I am the living bread,” and suggesting that they must eat his flesh, the Bread of Life. We should make no mistake, in their minds Jesus was not speaking figuratively. It was the literalness of Jesus’ remarks that scandalized them. And it would be scandal, if it were not true, but it is true.

Instead of being scandalous, Jesus’ words were life-giving. People are wandering aimlessly in their sins in a way not dissimilar to the Jews wandering in the wilderness, starving for want of spiritual food and a living relationship with the Father. Even as the heavenly manna was sent to nourish the physical bodies of the Israelites, so the Father sent us his Son, the true heavenly food, to nourish our souls. Jesus is the Living Water, the Bread of Life, all that we need to sustain our spiritual life. He was sent from the Father to be freely received by those who believe. However, it requires of us, as it did for the Jews who were scandalized by Jesus’ claims, an abandonment of a salvation and a savior made in our image, one we can understand, and which comfortably meets our preconceived ideas. It also equally requires abandoning ourselves through faith to the mysteries of salvation, a salvation made in God’s image and likeness. And so we see sandwiched between Jesus’ statement that he came from the Father, and his statement that he is the Bread of Life, the requirement to believe, “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life.”

It is purported that when Elizabeth I was a girl of sixteen, and England was going through the upheaval of religious conflict, she was asked about her belief in the Eucharist. Her reply was, “His was the Word who spoke it, He took the bread and broke it, and what that Word doth make it, I do believe and take it.” We too are confronted with Jesus’ Word, dare we not believe it.

“Let us submit to God in all things and not contradict Him, even if what He says seems contrary to our reason and intellect; rather let His words prevail over our reason and intellect. Let us act in this way with regard to the (eucharistic) mysteries, looking not only at what falls under our senses but holding on to His words. For His word cannot lead us astray,”*

* Mystery of Faith, by Pope Paul VI, (page 9).

INVITATION TO GROUP SHARING

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First Reading

1. How does this passage contribute to our understanding of the Eucharist?

Second Reading

2. What does it mean to “grieve” the Holy Spirit? How can we minimize grieving the Holy Spirit?
3. What are the characteristics of God that we are to imitate?

Gospel Reading

4. What is necessary for a person to embrace Jesus as the Bread sent from heaven?
5. How many statements can you find in this passage to substantiate Jesus’ deity?
6. God’s provision of manna in the wilderness (Exodus 16) was a foreshadowing of the Father’s provision of Jesus as the Living Bread sent from heaven. How many parallels can you discover that point to Jesus as the bread of life?

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 a final prayer.