



August 8, 2021

Nineteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

I am the bread of life. John 6:48

Dear Friends;

This past year of COVID-19 has been challenging for everyone. Those who regularly draw strength from the Eucharistic meal were unable to share in the food and drink that sustain our journey to the Kingdom. And even now we are experiencing a drought, unable as we are to share from the common cup. Being fed with the Eucharist meal is only one of the meanings of “the bread of life.” Yet even in pandemic shut-downs we can be nourished with the “bread of life.”

Bread in the Old Testament frequently represents divine instruction. Jesus indicates this when he loosely quotes from the Prophet Isaiah (54:13) “*They shall all be taught by God.*” The point would be understood by Jesus’ listeners: for those who believe in Jesus, the instruction he gives about the Father is life-giving bread.

In our first reading from 1 Kings, Elijah is on the run from King Ahab and his foreign wife Queen Jezebel. They turned away from the God of Israel and followed Jezebel’s cult of Baal. Elijah has spoken against them. And he is not sure if the people are on his side. Elijah is on the run from the King and Queen who are out to get him. Elijah wants to go to the mountain where Moses spoke with God. Crossing arid territory and having no food for the long journey Elijah lays under a scrubby tree and prays for death. In an ecstatic trance Elijah receives a hearth cake and water to sustain him for the journey ahead. He receives the bread of God’s strength.

In the Gospel of John the gift of Jesus is linked to the manna that sustained the people of Israel in their sojourn through the desert. They received food from heaven each day to keep them alive. This food literally flakes of protein found on the ground and the brush was their bread of life.

This Gospel of John links the bread of Jesus’ instruction to the Christian community’s celebration of the Eucharist. The Eucharist means more than receiving communion at Mass. The bread of life is meant to feed us in many ways. We don’t just receive the Eucharist in church. *We are called to be a Eucharistic people.* The Body of Christ is made up of three experiences: the person of Jesus, the Eucharistic meal, and the body of believers which is us. The body of believers is just as real and physical as the person of Jesus and the Eucharistic food. St Paul tells us that we “are” the Body of Christ not just a symbol or representation. So we too the People of God are also the Body of Christ and the bread of life. Some still murmur about this. It is easier for them to believe Christ is in bread than in their sisters and brothers.

At the Eucharistic liturgy it is not just bread and wine that are changed we also are changed. During the Eucharistic prayer the priest-presider calls on the Holy Spirit twice. First, it is to change the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. Secondly the Spirit is called to change those who receive the food and drink to become the body and blood of Christ. The early Church Father St Augustine would invite the newly baptized to the table by saying “*Receive who you are and become who you receive.*” Bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ because the community of the Body of Christ comes together to celebrate the memorial meal of the risen Christ.

The bread of life comes to us in many ways. Jesus nourishes us when we pray to him; The Eucharist feeds us with the bread of life when we share in it and when the community of God’s people functions as a nourishing and life-giving force. The love, friendship, support and care we give to others and we receive from others is also communion—holy nourishment from heaven, flakes of protein from the Body of Christ. The bread of life.

Peace,

Fr Ron