

## **B19<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**

Human life is sometimes difficult and overwhelming; hardships and misunderstandings can cross it in such a way that it becomes not only unbearable, but also unlivable. When it happens, people often say: "I have had enough, I cannot make it anymore". If this never happened to you, you could say that you are happy. But in reality, this is a normal human experience which can come our way one day or another. Each one of us has been, at one time or another, confronted with difficulties such that life seemed too heavy to lead. It is this very human experience that the prophet Elijah has had, as we heard in the first reading.

The complaints of the prophet follow the persecution he underwent after he preached against the king Ahab and the people of Israel for having abandoned Yahweh and embraced foreign gods. Those unhappy about his message tried to kill him. To save his life, he fled to the desert to find refuge; but the crossing was so harsh that he gave up in despair. It was at that moment when the prophet felt so sad, tired and alone that he begged God to let him die.

And yet the message the prophet preached was not his own, but from God. He has done only what he was required to do as duty. That is why God intervenes to show him that he is not alone and, even if he has to go through suffering, he is with him. God sends him an angel to comfort him and food to restore his strength. Notice, however, that God does not exempt Elijah from test; he has to keep going on with his hard journey.

The desert that Elijah has to cross is the symbol and the image of our lives. Conflicts, hardships and storms of life can be such in our lives that we feel depressed and alone. At times, we are really down and we want to run away. If in such a situation, you have survived and did not renounce your duties or resigned from your obligation, tells you that in a mysterious way, God sent you his angel to sustain you and to help cope with the situation. It is God who gives courage to support the shocks of life; it is him who gives true food to restore our strength when we are tired of life, hungry and thirsty.

All this helps us understand why Jesus presents himself in today's Gospel as the bread of life. In fact, God has sent his son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that through him all might live. As the Father and the Son are one, it follows that to see the Son is seeing the Father; to welcome the Son is welcoming the Father. Consequently, whatever gives the Son of God is full of life. The word he gives is life for the world; the bread he gives, brings life to the world. As the Father lives eternally and has given eternal life to the Son, so the Son gives eternal life to those who believe in him.

In this perspective, when Jesus talks about the bread of life he gives, it is less about material bread than about himself. It is all about his flesh offered for the salvation of the world. It is all about his Word that gives life and which people must assimilate like bread until it becomes part of themselves.

This process is in contrast to what happened under Moses, because even if their fathers to whom the Jews refer ate the manna in the desert, these people died. But whoever eats of the bread that comes from Jesus will live forever. Here lies the scandal of the Gospel, namely that God is among us in a person, and a man like us, and that this Jesus gives life to the world.

It was so hard for Jews to accept such a claim in so far they knew Jesus and his family. He grew up among them. They knew all about him: his mother, his father, and his relatives. How could he say that he comes down from heaven? How could a man pretend to resemble God? Of course, Jesus admits that nobody has seen God, but he also states that if one wants to reach God and to know him, he has to pass through him. In other words, the humanity of Christ is the means to rise to God; it is a path that leads to the Father. His humanity, weak and fragile, is the true nourishment sent from heaven capable of satisfying the need for a full life present in the heart of every person.

This saying of Jesus to the Jews is true if even they do not accept it. He is the bread that satisfies our hunger and renews our force. Whoever comes to him and recognizes in him the revelation of the will of the Father, will live forever. To those who accept Christ and feed on the bread of heaven, St Paul recommends today to let themselves be guided by his Holy Spirit and to be the imitators of God by living in love for one another.

As a word of conclusion, let me say this: In time of hardship, we may share our problems and difficulties with others in the hope of finding comfort, help and hope. But, we must never forget how much light, consolation and strength we would get if we fed ourselves with the bread of God's word. We must never forget that it is God who acts through the encouraging words and the consolation of friends and relatives.

A second thing I would like to say is this: America is a country where there is an abundance of bread and food. When I sometimes enter a bakery, I am struck by the variety and the types of bread available. But I am pretty sure that even if there are people who are in abundance, there still are many who starve for real food. When we come to discover, beyond our ordinary food, that Jesus is our real food, we become open to those who have nothing, because we can share what we have earned as blessing from God. Today, in the Eucharist, Jesus touches us with compassion and tells us to "get up and eat". We still have a long journey ahead of us, with temptations and troubles; we need to be comforted. Let us get up and eat the real food that gives the Son of God.

Let me now finish by telling you a story: A man got lost in a desert. When he was tired, hungry and thirsty, he saw from afar palm trees and even heard water running. But, he said to himself: "this it is just an illusion; my mind is playing me a ruse". Hopeless and unconscious, he fell down and in the heat of the desert, he died. -When few minutes later, two Bedouins passed by, they exclaimed and could understand how this guy passed away at few meters from an oasis, with nuts almost hanging at his mouth. -Then the other said: "He was a modern man!" Modern man knows a lot about the world, science, history, economy, etc. We,

modern men, know more than our ancestors and we try to explain everything with our science. But, modern men, we have become prisoners of our knowledge and we have lost the ability of being surprised by what we don't know. Like the men in the Gospel who think they know a lot about Jesus' family, few accept that Jesus is the bread of life. Like the lost man in the desert, the modern man is dying, hungry and thirsty, in front of a house full of bread that gives life. Jesus is the bread of life; whoever eats this bread lives forever. Let us get up and eat; the journey is still long ahead of us.



Homily Date: August 13, 2006  
© 2006 – Father Felicien Ilunga Mbala  
Contact: [www.mbala.org](http://www.mbala.org)  
Document Name: 20060813homily.pdf