

## **Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time B/2009**

Life is a long journey. Along this journey, there are moments of joy and success; but there are also moments of crisis, failure and conflicting experience. When we come to such an experience of life, we need people who can encourage us with their words and their support. We need people who can provide for our needs so that we keep going in spite of hard times. All the readings of this Sunday teach us that God is a sure support and a help always at hand in our difficult times.

The first reading of the book of kings describes what happened to Elijah as he was fleeing the country after being threatened to be killed at the instigation of Queen Jezebel. In fact, the prophet had just preached against King Ahab and the people of Israel for having abandoned their God and embraced foreign gods. Those who were unhappy about his message tried to kill him. In order to save his life, he fled to the desert to find refuge at the mountain of the Lord. The crossing of the desert was so harsh, without food and without water, that he gave up in despair.

It was at that moment, as he felt so overwhelmed, tired and alone that the prophet begged God to let him die. Instead of letting him die, however, God intervened in a very miraculous way in order to show him that he was not alone, even if he had to go through suffering and hardships. He sent him an angel to comfort him and bring him food and water to restore his strength.

This episode shows us that God did not spare Elijah from suffering persecution. On the contrary, he let him continue his hard journey to the mountain, but without abandoning him. It is like that sometimes God acts with us. He lets us deal with the difficult problems of our life, but in the midst of this he does not abandon us.

That is why the desert Elijah had to cross is the symbol of our own lives confronted with conflicts and hardships. Sometimes the storms of life can be such that we feel alone and overwhelmed. At times, we are really down and we want to run away. If it happened that in such a situation, we did not give up and stood firm, it was God who provided for our needs, sustained us and helped us survive.

As a matter of fact, it is God who gives us courage to support the shocks of life. It is he who gives food to restore our strength when, without resources, we are overwhelmed with the difficulties of life. All this helps us understand why Jesus presents himself in today's Gospel as the bread of life.

What he meant with all this is that, in our journey through life, we need him lest we lose strength and perspective. As the material bread is essential to the sustenance of our body, so is the bread that he gives essential for the nourishment of our souls. The Jews who heard him speaking this way did not believe him. They did so because they judged things only from the outside and according to human values and standards. They locked themselves in human reasoning and missed the opportunity to recognize God's grace and presence in the person of Jesus.

The Jews thought that, because they knew Jesus' origin and relatives, he could not be something different. 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 order to do so, we need faith in Jesus, for only those accept Jesus whom God draws to him through faith. Only whoever believes in him has eternal life.

Without faith, we cannot recognize the presence of Jesus in the Eucharistic bread. The Eucharistic bread and wine are signs of Christ's mysterious presence to us. They are food for our journey to the mountain where we hope to meet God. The Eucharistic bread stands in contrast to the manna that Moses gave to the Hebrews in the desert. The Israelites who ate the manna in desert all died anyway. But whoever eats of the bread that comes from Jesus will live forever. The bread that Jesus gives is his flesh for the life of the world.

These words of Jesus to the Jews are still true today, even if there are people who do not accept them. Jesus is the bread that satisfies our hunger and renews our strength. Whoever comes to him and recognizes in him the revelation of the will of the Father, will live forever. To us who accept Christ and feed on the bread of heaven, St Paul recommends that we let ourselves be guided by his Holy Spirit and to be the imitators of God by living in love for one another.

To be imitators of God means to live according to the Spirit of Christ and behave according to God's law. In fact, what St Paul lays down here is the principle of good personal relationship as a vital instrument to the conviviality among us and a testimony to our life in Christ. That is why it is important that we treat others as we would like to be treated. It is not with bitterness, anger, resentment, revenge, reviling, loud talking, and insulting language that we can build good relationships and live in peace with one another.

Let me remind you again that life is a long journey made up of problems and conflicts. In time of hardship, we feel the need to share our problems and difficulties with others in the hope of finding comfort and help. But, we must never forget how much consolation and strength we would get when we feed ourselves with the bread that Jesus gives in the Eucharist. We must never forget that it is God who acts through the encouraging words and the consolation of friends and relatives when we are in a period of trouble.

All that is to say that, in this long journey, the Eucharist and the words of Jesus are of vital importance for us. Jesus comes to us as the bread of life in order to strengthen us and give us eternal life. Remember that, although our country is rich in bread and food of all types, 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 "get up and eat". Do not despise or ignore the invitation of the Lord. Prepare yourself to receive the Lord. 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. God bless you all!

**1 Kings 19, 4-8; Ephesians 4, 30-5, 2; John 6, 41-51**



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