

NINETEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

LECTIONARY #116

READING I 1 Kings 19:4-8

A reading from the first Book of Kings

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.

Read Elijah's request, "This is enough," with staccato to show this is no idle threat.

The appearance of angels usually brings fear. Read with surprise that food has "appeared."

Elijah = ee-li-juh

This divine food calls to mind the Eucharist, which strengthens us for our journey of discipleship.

Horeb = HOHR-eb

READING I

Reminiscent of last Sunday's reading from Exodus, in which the Israelites found themselves needing food in the wilderness on the way to the mountain of God, today we hear of Elijah journeying into the desert toward God's mountain (here called Horeb), only to find short of food and strength. However, unlike the Israelites who, when we encountered them last week, had just been delivered from Egyptian forces, Elijah is being actively pursued by the henchmen of Jezebel and Ahab for having killed the prophets of Baal with the sword (1 Kings

19:1-3). He is a force to be reckoned with, yet Elijah is fleeing for his life. The prophet's strength and daring, which enabled him to engage in a grim but righteous feat, have dried up. His courage and resolve give way to fear. Elijah, catapulted into a life-threatening flight into the wilderness, faces an acute lack of resources and sustenance. As Elijah sinks beneath the shade of a tree, the famished fugitive considers himself no better than his ancestors who also wandered in the wilderness. But instead of begging God for food, Elijah begs God for death. The Lord of life will have none of it.

Twice God sends a messenger (an angel) with bread, water, and a message: "Get up and eat." This message will echo in Christ's repeated mandate to those whom he raises from illness and death. Ultimately, strengthened by heavenly sustenance, Elijah continues his journey to God's mountain and his broader prophetic mission. Like last week's first reading, this account of God's chosen one languishing in the desert prepares us for Jesus' message today in the Gospel.

For meditation and context:

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 34:2-3, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9 (9a)

R. 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.
 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.

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.
 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.

READING II Ephesians 4:30—5:2

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Ephesians

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.

Ephesians = ee-FEE-zhuhnz

The first list is what grieves the Spirit.

Read slowly so listeners can find themselves.

The second list is what it means to imitate Christ. Similarly, read at a measured pace so that the assembly can recognize these good qualities within themselves.

Use a soft and gentle tone. The same forgiveness extended to us should be extended to others.

READING II

Ephesians exhorts its audience to recognize what God has done in Christ and to put aside thoughts and actions not aligned with life in Christ. By saying that the Holy Spirit operates in the life of the faithful as a seal "for the day of redemption," Ephesians recalls an ancient biblical tradition known as the "day of the Lord." Common in prophetic literature, this "day" was an imagined, divinely sanctioned upheaval that sup- planted all wrongdoing, injustice, and injury with God's justice and righteousness. The unavoidability of such a "day" invites acting

in accord with God's ways and seeking the Lord's protection. For the Ephesians, and for us, abiding in an upright relationship with the Holy Spirit is paramount, for the Spirit protects against that "day." To maintain our relationship with the Holy Spirit, avoidance and removal of certain internal states is in order. Anger and malice in all its forms cannot be given quarter—these are directly contradictory to the Spirit. Rather, a life lived in love, and willingness to sacrifice oneself for others mark a life lived in the Spirit. Where such attitudes prevail, not

GOSPEL

As we continue to hear the Bread of Life Discourse, concerns emerge among Jesus' audience.

only does the Spirit rejoice, but also the "fragrant" sacrifice of Christ continues to be offered to God. The figurative language here is reminiscent of sacrificial food offerings, which invites us to consider the offering we make of ourselves as we approach the Eucharistic banquet. To what extent is our self-offering a delightful "aroma" to the Lord?

This Jewish community in Galilee knows

GOSPEL John 6:41-51

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John

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."

A rhetorical question. They are confirming an assumption.

Use a comma after "come to me." "Unless" doesn't need a comma in this sentence.

"Flesh" points us to the Eucharist but also reminds us of the truth of Jesus' nature, that he is divine and human.

Jesus. They know his family. They know he is not someone important, not a man of high status. He is just another Galilean Jew like them. Yet they have heard him refer to himself as the bread of life and say that he is food and drink that, once consumed, will remove all hunger and thirst forever. He has called himself heavenly bread, and he didn't mean it metaphorically. Their murmuring recalls the complaints of the chosen people during their initial wanderings in the wilderness, complaints heard in the first reading last Sunday. Here, as in the wilderness and when Elijah sat parched under a shade tree, the Lord shows compassion on the people. He grasps and understands their concerns. Responding to their complaints, Jesus continues teaching his audience by appealing repeatedly to Scripture. He freely cites Isaiah 54:13 to remind them that the prophetic tradition promised that God would attract and teach all people. Thus, they are drawn to his words for a reason. Then, turning to a still more primordial source—the Pentateuch—he points to the story of manna in the wilderness. In that situation, food was a temporary solution to the people's concern. However, in Jesus, the soul-deep hunger and parched spirit that the whole human community knows meets satisfaction. Anticipated in the angelic bread that nourished Elijah for a protracted desert journey, Jesus sustains the weary and murmuring beyond all precursors. He is the bread of life. But will his audience accept his claim? E.W.