

Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B  
1Kgs 19:4-8  
Ps 34:2-9  
Eph 4:30-5:2  
Jn 6:41-51

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Well, here we are on the 19<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, and the dog days of summer. What has the Holy Spirit served up today from the Lectionary?

We started with Elijah going into the desert. This was not like what Jesus did; Jesus spent 40 days in the desert to pray and to prepare for his public ministry. Elijah is depressed, dejected, and discouraged. He went into the desert to die. God had something else in mind. God sent an angel with food and drink, and, having given Elijah the sustenance he needed, God sent him on a mission, to cross the desert to the sacred mountain of revelation. In Elijah's Northern Kingdom they called it Horeb; the Southerners called it Mount Sinai.

As a rule, the Church selects the first reading, usually from the Old Testament, to coordinate with the Gospel. Today's Gospel reading continues the journey we began 2 weeks ago through the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gospel of John. Each of the 4 Gospels is distinct from the other three; each one paints a different portrait of Jesus. The Gospel of John is the most distinct. For instance, John devotes 5 chapters to the Last Supper without even mentioning the institution of the Eucharist. Instead, it's only in the Gospel of John that we find Jesus washing the feet of the disciples at the Last Supper. And instead, we get the long, long 6<sup>th</sup> chapter with its Bread of Life discourse. That's where John the Evangelist focuses on the Eucharist.

Like a Shakespeare play, the Lectionary divides the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter into five acts. In Act One, two weeks ago, Jesus fed the multitude with a measly 5 barley loaves and 2 fish. It ended with the people wanting to proclaim Jesus their king, because, "Hey! what's not to like about food you don't have to pay for or work for?" But Jesus knew that it was not his mission to become that kind of king, and he slipped away.

Last week, in Act Two, the crowd followed him across the Sea of Galilee and Jesus started teaching them. He taught that his Father sent him not to feed their bodies but to feed their souls. God's bread gives life to the world. The crowd like what they hear, and they say, "Gimme! We want in!" And the curtain falls as Jesus points to himself and says, "I am the bread of life."

Act 3. Today. The people are confused: how can this guy, whom we know after all, claim to *be* the bread of life? Jesus answers that those who have been drawn by God will be taught by God that Jesus is indeed the one who was sent by God. And it is in and

through Jesus that we have eternal life. And then he doubles down: “I am the living bread that came down from heaven,” he says; “whoever eats this bread will live forever; and *the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.*”

Those words end today’s reading and will be proclaimed again at the beginning of next week’s Gospel, Act 4. Now the people are flipping out. What can Jesus possibly mean? And he doubles down yet again! “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. . . . My flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.”

That brings us to Act 5. The people are confused. They don’t understand what Jesus is saying, but it sure sounds like he’s talking about cannibalism. And that’s crazy talk. And they turn away from Jesus. Notice that he doesn’t chase after them; he doesn’t say (as he said to Nicodemus in chapter 3, about being born again), “Hey, it’s just a metaphor.” No, the Eucharist is so much more than a symbol or a metaphor.

When most of the crowd has walked away, Jesus turns to the apostles and asks, “What about you?” And they answer, “To whom will we go? You have the words of eternal life.” They don’t mean that they have no alternative, that they have nowhere else to go. No, like the rest of the crowd, they are free to go back to their pre-Jesus lives. But they know Jesus. Even if they don’t understand, they trust Jesus. And they will continue to follow him.

And that is the invitation God extends to each one of us. Trust him. Follow him. We encounter Jesus in the Church and through the Church. We trust Jesus and follow Jesus from within the Church. But many of us are finding it hard, indeed impossible to trust the Church because of the wickedness and hypocrisy of some of the Church’s leaders. New revelations of gross misconduct on the part of high-placed authorities in the Church may shake our faith and send us reeling. We may be tempted, like Elijah, to drop out, head to the desert, and hope for an end. But the Gospel does not direct us to place our faith and trust in the Church as a human institution or in the ones who have attained positions of power and authority in the Church. The Gospel calls us to trust Jesus and to follow Jesus, whom we encounter in the Sacraments and in the fellowship we have in the Church.

To whom will we go? Jesus is the bread of life. Jesus has the words of everlasting life.