

12th August 2018 (19th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B)

1 Kings 19:4-8; Psalm 33(34):2-9; Ephesians 4: 30-5:2; John 6: 41-51.

I am the bread of life.

In the person of Jesus, God the Father feeds us and invites us to believe in him. Faith is both a gift freely given to us by God and a response we need to work towards.

In the first reading we see the prophet Elijah, exhausted and dejected, running away from the anger of queen Jezebel. Elijah wants to abandon his mission and die, but God tells him he is that his journey has not yet ended, and provides him with food and nourishment for him to be able to continue his journey.

In the gospel Jesus makes a reference to the manna the Israelites ate in the desert after they left Egypt. The manna was a gift from God to his people, not something they worked for. They were given that food to sustain them on their journey towards the promised land, but it was simply food meant to nourish them physically.

Jesus tells his disciples that he is the true bread that brings life; his is living bread! Most gospel commentators agree that at this point of the discourse, the reference to bread of life is not as yet a reference to the Eucharist. The Eucharistic reference in the chapter 6 of John's gospel come later. At this point Jesus is inviting his disciples to 'eat of this bread' that is himself; that is to believe in him.

In the beginning of the gospel of John we are told that the word of God became flesh in Jesus (Jn 1:14), now Jesus himself repeats this theology by asserting that he is the true bread that has come down from heaven. Although we see in front of us a person that is fully human – the son of Mary and Joseph – he is in fact the Son of God that the Father has sent for us into to the world – for God so loved the world (Jn 3:16).

God wants us all to be saved, without any distinction whatsoever. Jesus has become bread for us so that the world may live! In Jesus God himself took on our human form so that he can communicate with us and invite us to believe in him. In Jesus God has become accessible to us so that he can reach out to us and save us. But God fully respects our free will and does not save us without our participation. Jesus is this bread provided for our nourishment, but we now need to step forward and eat of this bread, engage in this journey by participating in this meal.

When we accept Jesus as being the Son of God, when we believe and entrust ourselves to God through his Son, then we can enjoy the salvation God has prepared for us. Jesus uses the image of life to refer to life in God. He tells his disciples that while the Israelites who ate the manna died (physically) those who believe in him, and eat this living bread, will live forever (in God). The manna was an earthly food miraculously provided by God to nourish his people; Jesus is God himself, so he is living bread and when we eat him we share in the life he gives.

Jesus invites his listeners, and us, to believe that he truly is from God. The true purpose of bread is to be eaten; so Jesus invites us to engage with and dig our teeth into this living bread that is himself. Only by believing in Jesus do we accept God's invitation to share in his own life. Faith is a deep personal relationship with God which can only be achieved by sharing in the life of Jesus his Son.

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