

Homily of Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B, 2024

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

In 1 Kings 18, Elijah had proved that Baal was a false god and that the Lord was the true God. Elijah also ordered the killing of 450 Baal prophets. Jezebel, the wife of King Ahab, pursued Elijah to kill him. Elijah fled into the desert. As we read in the first reading, the angel of the Lord fed Elijah and got him ready for his journey of forty days and forty nights to Mount Horeb for an encounter with God.

I imagine that Elijah had expected God to intervene and stop Jezebel from coming after him, but that did not happen. Probably, that was the reason Elijah was so distraught and heartbroken that he prayed for death. However, God was not offended by Elijah's prayer for his own death; rather, God sent an angel to provide enough food and drink for Elijah for his journey. Elijah wanted it his own way, like many of us do; but God had his divine plans for him. God used Elijah's bitter experience to bring him to Mount Horeb to have a special encounter with him as never before (1 Kings 19:9-18). As it was for Elijah, our bitter experiences can lead us to special encounters with God if we trust in him.

God tells us through Prophet Isaiah, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways ... For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, my thoughts higher than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9). Also, through Prophet Jeremiah God assures us, "I know the plans I have for you, ... plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and future" (Jeremiah 29:11).

In our trials, let us not give up hope or pray to die. Rather, let us pray for the strength to persevere and that God's divine plan may come to realization. Being Christians or Catholics does not mean that we are exempt from trials and temptations. Nevertheless, our faith is in Jesus' assurance, "In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world" (John 16:33). Do you feel abandoned? Are you under adversaries' malicious attack? Are you distraught and heartbroken? Do you think your prayers are not answered? Get up, eat, and drink, be strengthened, trust God. He has his plan for you!

The first reading says, "The angel of the Lord came back a second time, touched Elijah, and said, 'Get up and eat or the journey will be too much 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" (1 Kings 19:7-8). In the gospel, Jesus says, "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" (John 6:51). Elijah ate hearth cake and drank water and was strengthened to walk for forty days and forty nights to the mountain of God. For us, the word of God and the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ we consume is our spiritual food for our earthly journey to our heavenly home.

In the second reading, St. Paul instructs us the best way to proceed on the earthly journey, "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" (Ephesians 4:31-32). He concludes, "Be imitators of God ... and live in love" (Ephesians 5:2).

Elijah's encounter with God in the first reading is for our better understanding of today's gospel. It is about what happens or can happen to us when we encounter Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. The Eucharist empowers us to battle and overcome the 'Baals,' the 'Baal prophets,' and 'the Jezebels' in the way of our earthly journey. The Eucharist transforms us from fear to courage, from distraught to consolation, and from despair to hope and strength. The Eucharist transforms us to imitate Christ and be able to live in love of God and in love of neighbor. Also, as Elijah received a new mission when he encountered God on Mount Horeb, we receive the mission of witnessing Jesus Christ when we receive the Eucharist.

Today is one of the many times the Church reminds us and draws our attention to the power of the Eucharist. When Jacob woke up from his sleep and dream, and realized God's awesome presence he exclaimed, "Surely, the Lord is in this place, and I am not aware of it" (Genesis 28:16). If, only, many of us can wake up from our ignorance and lack of faith and discover the awesome mystery and power of the Eucharist, we will exclaim as Jacob did.

Praise and thanks be to God for his indescribable and inestimable gift of the Holy Eucharist to us!

Fr. Martin Eke, MSP