

“THE BREAD OF SACRIFICE”
SUNDAY ORDINARY 19 B
FOR AUGUST 8, 2021 –ST. PATRICK CATHOLIC CHURCH

God could have been harsh to Elijah
as a result of his depressing prayer.
But instead, after he fell asleep,
a quiet touch from God’s
angel awakened him.
The angel whispered to him, *“Get up and eat . . .”*
And, lo and behold, as our first reading said,
“. . . there at his head was a hearth cake and a jug of water.”

The prophet Elijah was weak from hunger,
but the angel of the Lord feeds him
with a hearth cake and a jug of water.
Elijah was then no longer hungry,
but what is more important, we are told,
he was *“Strengthened by that food,
he walked forty days and forty nights,
to the mountain of God . . .”*
There was work to do,
a journey to be made,
and the **food** made it possible.

What we were witnessing there,
was a mother’s care, giving food to a discouraged child.

The other readings too are all about God’s kindness,
his goodness - even in small things.

Our Responsorial Psalm today invites us to share in it:
*“Taste and see the goodness of the Lord. ...
I sought the Lord, and he answered me
and delivered me from all my fears.”*

And in our Gospel, Jesus again offers nourishment,
and this time the provisions
are for a very long journey indeed,
the journey to eternal life.

The people listening aren't buying what he's selling.
They argue among themselves,
ridiculing his silly offer of miraculous food.
They “murmured” that they knew his parents,
which probably just made him a local boy acting crazy.
Jesus told them to just stop and listen.

He made the same comparison
that we saw last week,
between **manna** that came down
from heaven in the desert, and himself,
who was “. . . *the living bread that came down from heaven.*”

We should be concentrating
on the deliberate kindness of God:
feeding people, giving them drink,
pursuing them **again** and **again**
in order to offer the greatest gift of all,
God's sacrificial love for **all** of us.

God pursues us quietly, gently.

And how should we respond?
To begin with, how about receiving
the living bread in Communion?
Another way could be to pray
and work for peace and justice in our nation,
and in our world.

Also, simply slowing down,
to stop the running away
and instead letting the Lord find us.
God's kindhearted love, is also tough,
but proves to be worth the effort.

Here is how St. Paul put it in our second reading:
*“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 . . .”*

When Jesus talks about the bread
that he is giving, he compares it to manna,
a role similar to Elijah's food:
that manna enabled a journey to take place –
out of the desert and into the promised land.

So, it is obvious that Jesus intends the bread of life
not just to satisfy hunger, but also,
to make possible the accomplishment of

the completion of a journey.
That journey is our road to salvation.

If you remember, in our opening prayer,
we prayed: “Bring us to our promised inheritance.”

But Jesus has to have something else in mind also,
because he talks not just about feeding
but also becoming food, when he says:
*“The bread I will give is my flesh,
for the life of the world.”*

And so, we are to sacrifice **ourselves**,
as Jesus did on the cross,
for the sake of the poor, the lowly and the disadvantaged.

Jesus feeds us to be his presence
in the midst of their hunger and hurt,
so that they and we, **together**,
can complete the journey to the
mountain of God...just as Elijah did.

I’ll leave you with a quote from a document
issued in 1971 by a Synod of 270
worldwide Bishops who gathered to
discuss justice in the world:

*“According to the Christian message, **man's** (our) relationship
to **his** (our) neighbor is bound up with **his** (our) relationship to
God; **his** (our) response to the love of God, saving us through
Christ, is shown to be effective in **his** (God's) love and service*

of ~~men~~ (humankind). Christian love of neighbor and justice cannot be separated.

For love implies an absolute demand for justice, namely a recognition of the dignity and rights of one's neighbor. Justice attains its inner fullness only in love. Because every ~~man~~ (person) is truly a visible image of the invisible God and a brother (or sister) of Christ, the Christian finds in every ~~man~~ (person) God himself and God's absolute demand for justice and love.”

(Parenthetical expressions added for inclusive language – original language shown as strikethrough)

Synod of Bishops, *Justice in the World*, 1971: 34.