19th Sunday of the Year

Year B

The Father Who Draws Us To Himself.

Elijah was drawn to the mountain of God by the Lord who gave him food and drink.
The Father is drawing us to himself by offering us the bread of life at this Mass.

(Readings: 1 Kings 19: 4-8. Strengthened by the food he walked until he reached the mountain of God.
Ephesians 4: 30- 5: 2. Following Christ by loving as he loved you.
John 6: 41- 51. I am the living bread which has come down from heaven.)

Of all the characters in the bible I think people probably identify with Elijah the most when he says, 'Lord, I've had enough.' Broken and dispirited on his journey in the wilderness, he could no longer cope. He had reached the end of his tether. In a state of exhausted desperation, totally dispirited, and at his lowest ebb, an angel of God came to his rescue, and fed him with miraculous food, a scone and a jar of refreshing water.

Elijah's failing hopes and sense of purpose were completely restored by this nourishment from heaven, and he continued his journey to the holy mountain of Horeb, where he received a new vision of God, a vision in the form of a gentle breeze. This not only gave him renewed courage, but it also gave him the necessary faith to march on, and to face all the challenges of another day.

How many times, in our darker moments, have we felt like echoing Elijah's words? 'Lord, I've had enough!'

I'm sure you don't need me to tell you that Christian life is, by no means, plain sailing. Nor do you need me to tell you that we can often find ourselves equally broken, even crushed, by some of the circumstances that inevitably come our way. Left to our own devices, our own resources, we are simply unable to find any glimmer of light in the dark places we find ourselves in. Just to keep going, we need an assurance that we are not alone in our lives. We need to know that God is with us, helping us to carry our crosses, and rescuing us from every event and circumstance that leads us away from him.

Today's Gospel reminds us that we have all the help we need in Jesus, he who is 'the Bread of Life'. He brings to each one of us all that is required, all that is necessary to sustain us on our own pilgrim journey to God.

If a person is always mean or selfish or unforgiving, if they are constantly uncooperative or cantankerous or uncaring, and all those other negative feelings, although they may go to Mass every single day of their lives, they will never be any the better for it. And the real sadness is they will only have themselves to blame! But with Jesus' help in the Eucharist, in our daily efforts and struggles, we are empowered, and we are gifted, with all that is needful to be a better person, even to living the life of a saint.

Just consider, for a moment, what Jesus is to us in the Blesséd Sacrament of the holy Eucharist. He is the very 'Living Bread which has come down to us from heaven', the unique source of true life. He is remedy for the sick soul, nourishment for the wounded spirit, light and strength for the weary mind. He is the actual, vital source of new and eternal life, he, whose presence and power strengthens us.

In the Eucharist we have all that we need to become saints. And if we are not saints… Well, we cannot blame Jesus! We have only ourselves to blame, because coming to Jesus means so very much more than a mere trip up to the altar for Holy Communion, however regular that trip may be.

If Jesus can make himself available to us, desiring to help us, as he does, then surly we should respond appropriately. For the sake of our God-given souls, we ought to be constantly longing for Jesus, carefully preparing our hearts and our minds to receive him in his most blesséd and Holy Communion.

The stronger our faith in what we are about, the greater our love for him will be, and therein, our love for our neighbour.

To approach the altar unprepared, out of mere thoughtless habit, or worst still, with a heart full of bitterness because of past hurts inflicted on us, is not a true sharing in the Eucharist. Such feelings benefit no one, and certainly, not us!

We cannot offer ourselves to God without trying to be more caring, without genuinely loving other people, God's people. As Christians we are called to love both our neighbour and our enemy, equally! And that includes all those who may have hurt us, or who may have let us down during the week.

In our daily living we are called to be forgiving; to strive to overcome our faults; to understand the faults and failings of our families and our friends, and not to close or harden our hearts when we are offended.

In the Eucharist we meet the openness, and the generosity of God, who is always ready to forgive us, and who only asks us, in our turn, to give as freely as we have received. The Eucharist is our best, our most perfect opportunity for reconciliation for old wounds, for past sores to be bound up, and for true forgiveness to be shown. Isn't that what we witness to in the sharing of the Peace? – It is if it is God's peace. And if not, it's merely a disparaging sham!

God will always love us. And he wants us, his children, to love each other. For if we do not love each other, then, our reception of Holy Communion will be of no benefit to us whatsoever. And that being so, let us ask the Holy Spirit, from this moment, until we receive Jesus in the Blesséd Sacrament of the altar, to help us prepare ourselves to receive him with a truly contrite and caring heart, and so become more like him.

The 'living bread', we receive in Holy Communion, gives us all that is wholesome, all that is necessary for our soul. And with this living bread comes Jesus' promise, that whoever receives it worthily in this life, will live for ever in glory. – Pray God it may it be so. Amen.