

August 8, 2021, Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
Gospel of John 6:41-51
Fr. Brad

There's a story told about an old coach of a university football team and the team was having one of those bad years where nothing they could do is right. In their consecutive string of losses, the alumni were starting to get nervous, and they were starting to want his head on a platter because they were losing so many games. Finally, the last straw was in late November when they played their final game against their archrivals, and they were beaten soundly. I guess that was the final nail in the coffin. The next morning, the coach gets an email saying the last train leaving town tomorrow is at noon. Be underneath it.

Can you imagine how he felt? We've all had feelings in our lives where nothing has gone right for maybe an extended period of time and wonder "God, what's going on here?" Well that's pretty much how Elijah felt. What's going on here? I've been loyal. I've been doing my thing for this long. I've been loyal and just finished waging battle with idolatry which was rampant at that time. He was doing God's work and what does he get for it? Well Jezebel and others are out to kill him. He's fleeing and running for his life and wondering what's the point. At this point he says it is enough. He's dispirited. He's tired. He's fearful. He's exhausted from everything and just wants to die and finally get peace. But he also says, "Lord I'm no better than my ancestors. What's it all been worth? What is the fruit of all I've been doing?" He's dejected.

Perhaps we've had moments in our lives where we've felt that ourselves. Has it all been worth it? And what happens, well he's fed. In a word, it's an angel that wakes him up and says you've got to eat and drink. He looks and there's food and drink there, he takes it and then he goes back to sleep. But it happens a second time and it's really the second time that kind of nudges him enough to realize hey God has something in mind here. He doesn't know what, but it's food for the journey so he gets up and he carries on. And it's a long journey and it's food for the journey.

That image in that reading is an ancient reading and it's lasted this long for us to hear too. Why, because it says something about our human condition, it says something about God, it says something about our relationship with God. What is it saying? Well, it's kind of saying that you know I'm not going to eliminate all your enemies, Elijah. You know they're still probably going to chase you but I'm going to be with you because there is something more for you to do. It's a reminder to us that God is with us. He doesn't take away -- there's not a solution necessarily or to fix the problem but he's going to be with us through the difficulties of life. He's not going to take them away and when we look at Jesus himself at Gethsemane there's a point where he's at the end of his rope. "Lord if this cup can be taken away let it be so, but not my will but thine will be done." And what happened, well God didn't take it away; he was crucified the next day. But God was with him God saw him through.

So food for the journey means strength for us in the difficult times in the deepest difficult times. Thankfully we have good times too that kind of remind us and in its own way help keep us going but in those darkest of times what is the food for the journey that keeps us going. The bread -- the word companion the word c-o-m is the Latin word for 'with' and panis is the Latin word for 'bread' with bread. Companion with bread means a companion is one who walks with you, who you break bread together with. That's the root word.

Think of yourselves in situations in your life where all you needed was a little bit of encouragement and you knew it wasn't going to be easy but you knew you had the encouragement. Think of sports figures like the Olympians -- the athletes -- you know there was no people in the stadium. They talked about that how are we going to perform when we don't have people cheering us on. Well they had people cheering them on from home. So many of them tell stories about 'I was doing this for my kids and I knew they were watching on television at home and I was able to pull out my best performance and that encouraged me and it strengthened me'.

We need that as human beings. Think of your kids, your grandkids or even yourself when you were little and mom or dad or both or grandma and grandpa came to your baseball game or your hockey game or your football game whatever you were playing. How that gave you a lift -- it gives the kid a lift. Or the person performing their best performance, so here they are 'I better do the best I can because they're watching'.

If we know in faith that God is watching us and not just watching us but cheering for us. He's not doing it for us. We've still got to do it but he's cheering for us and he's with us. He's with us all the way and Elijah got clued in. With Elijah, he was able to do 40 days with that little bit of food. It was probably a little bit about the food and a little bit about the knowledge that God was with him that made the difference because up to that point, he was at the end of his rope. He was dispirited. He was ready to throw in the towel. "God this isn't even working, are you even paying attention here?" God was paying attention all right and we're tempted a little bit to think that when we don't see God actively working, things aren't going well, we're having a bad day or a bad week or a bad month or a bad pandemic. We start to wonder where God is in all of this. Make no mistake; God is with us through every bit of this.

One of the signs of that, certainly in our catholic tradition, is our eucharistic celebration. Breaking bread together is a perpetual thing that we do right from the beginning, right from the Last Supper when Jesus established that new and everlasting covenant of breaking bread together. And we do it in a ritualized way here and the bread and the wine transformed into the body and blood of our Lord. And so the bread of life that Jesus speaks of -- He the bread of life. That was hard for his listeners and he could probably understand why. I mean, they knew him as a kid and they're saying 'well he's the neighbour's kid'. 'You know he's Joseph's son, how can he say he's come from above?' 'How can he say that he's bread of life and that for flesh, his body is flesh for the world?' You know how hard to get your mind around but really his presence in the world to recognize the incarnation the divine love of God entering our world to teach

humanity about what it means to be children of God. Our own dignity, our own divine dignity that Jesus came into the world to awaken within us that mission to teach us about his presence and his presence within us.

It's often said that it's easier to believe the God in the bread and the wine than it is to believe God is within us. Sometimes the transcendence within us as human beings, our call is to recognize that so we can do as adopted brothers and sisters in Christ what Jesus did for the world. To dispel what Saint Paul is talking about, to dispel bitterness and anger and maliciousness and envy and all of those things that that clog us up inside and keep us from being the people we're called to be from the beginning. There's a surrender that goes with that and the letting go that goes with that our call to forgive one another, to forgive each other, to allow God's spirit to have room in our hearts and to realize that we get in the way of God's work within us. For a moment there that was happening with Elijah because of all the hardship. He was starting to forget that God was with him through the whole thing and he was renewed in spirit.

For us, our call, our recognition of God's presence, that's the most important thing. If we see and experience His presence and have faith in His presence, that encourages us and strengthens us in even the darkest of times. So as we continue in this eucharistic celebration, we're mindful that pride gets in the way of our recognizing God in the challenges and that God isn't the God who came into the world to fix for us but to help us get through the challenges. I work a lot with victims of abuse and one of the things I've certainly learned is that whenever you try to fix the situation or give advice, it's not helpful. What's really needed is that it can't be fixed. What happened similarly with the residential schools and the challenges of the past and the wrongdoings of the past can't be undone. They can't be fixed and when we're traumatized there's no fixing that but there's learning from that. And those who are victims, as traumatized as they have been, whether it's residential school or sexual abuse of any kind or whatever the trauma is, they need to be able to be heard. That people can say 'I hear you and I want to support you and help you and if there's any way I can accompany you'. That's what they need because that's what we all need -- accompaniment in our struggles whatever they are. We need to be heard; we need to know that we're supported and that strengthens us. In a way, that is food for the journey because it gives us the courage and the strength to carry on through the struggles of this world -- whatever ones we have faced in our own lives. And so we ask God to bless us, and we are reminded of His presence at this eucharistic celebration and that's what keeps us going, knowing He is with us and will always be with us through all eternity and we give thanks for that through this celebration. Amen