

Bishop Bradley's Reflections on the Sunday Readings

August 9, 2015 19th Sunday in Ordinary Time

On this beautiful day, we gather together, as members of individual families, but all of us united together are part of the large Family of Faith, and celebrate our faith in the best way we know how: at this Holy Mass, through the celebration of the Eucharist. As important as our families are to us, when we gather here we are united to----"in communion with"----all those who are baptized into Christ, members of the Body of Christ. All of us here are living our lives in this world and travelling on our journey through life.

What unites us---what *binds* us together---is that we are a part of God's family, and what strengthens us---what keeps us *focused* on our life journey---is our faith. What we celebrate here is what keeps us spiritually alive and nourished for our life journey--the Holy Eucharist!.

The Readings from God's Holy Word for today's Mass encourage us to reflect on the importance of our own life journey, and the spiritual nourishment we so desperately need along the way.

In today's First Reading, we heard about the Prophet of God, Elijah, who was "on the run" because the Queen, Jezebel, wanted to kill him! Maybe because Elijah was tired of running---maybe because he was just tired of living---whatever the reason, we heard that Elijah got to the point of wanting just to give up, to lay down and pray that God would let him die, so that all his troubles, worries and running would be over.

I imagine that many of us have had that feeling at one time or another. It's part of our human nature to have "ups" and "downs" in our lives all the time. But, there can be times in our lives when the "downs" become longer and deeper than the "ups". Maybe that could be because of troubles with work, worries about money and our future well-being, marital problems, serious illness of a loved one, or difficulties or disagreements between one generation and another. At times like that, if the only thing we had to rely on was ourselves, and the inner strength of our own human nature, we might never be able to get up----just like Elijah.

But, as we heard in today's Reading, God's Angel came to Elijah, told him to "*Get up!*"---and "*eat!*". First, he had to *get up*; second, he had to *eat* to gain strength. Elijah listened the first time, but laid right back down again. So, a second time, God's Angel told him: "*Get up and eat, else the journey will be too long for you!*"

Dear friends, that's what happens here when we come together as individuals, with our own families, and join together as one Family of Faith. We hear God speak to us. He tells us to "get up"/"wake up"/"pay attention". And then He speaks His life-giving Word to us: words of encouragement, words of forgiveness, words of direction---whatever it is that we need to hear so that we can continue the Journey moving forward in the right direction. And then, after hearing the Word, we are given the food that we need to help us to be spiritually strong. It may not be like the delicious foods that we might be planning on later on at a family gathering; but the food and drink God provides for us is what keeps us alive spiritually.

We heard Jesus teach us about this food in today's Gospel. We heard Him tell His followers 2,000 years ago, and *all* of us here today in 2015, that He IS "*the Living Bread come down from Heaven!*" St. John told us that the people who first heard Jesus say this reacted by "murmuring"---"grumbling"----"complaining": How can this be? "*Is this not Jesus, the son of*

Joseph? Do we not know his mother and father?" They figured they knew all about Him because they knew where He grew up, they knew His parents---they thought they knew all there was to know! So, they figured, He could not possibly be "*the Living Bread come down from Heaven*".

But Jesus simply said: "*Stop murmuring among yourselves....I am the Bread of Life....I am the Living Bread come 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.*"

Wow! Jesus is not just giving us regular food, but food that is Himself. He is not just giving us food for our bodies, but food for our spirits---and that is why He can promise us that when we eat **this** food, we will live forever.

My sisters and brothers in our Family of Faith, that is an incredible promise---a promise directly from the lips of Jesus, our Savior!. And **that** is why we come together to celebrate Jesus' fulfillment of that promise every week when we come together for Mass!

Dear friends, we know that we are mortal, human beings. We know that one day, in God's good time, our journey through life in this world will come to an end. But, because we are among those who "believe", then, as Jesus tells us today: "*whoever believes has eternal life...whoever eats this Bread will live forever.*"

That is why St. Paul tells us in today's Second Reading to: *be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us.*"

From one generation to the next, we pass on our precious gift of faith. It begins with our parents, who live lives of faith, and pass that gift on to their children by teaching them their prayers, being "imitators" of God in their homes, forming their children to be "God's children", and bringing them to Mass to "receive the Bread of Life" so that we will live forever.

As we continue with our Mass, let us rejoice because God loves us so much that He speaks to us His Word of Life and gives us the Eucharistic food that will help us to "*live forever with Him in Heaven*"---where there will be a never-ending and eternal Heavenly Feast.

God bless you, now and always!

Faithfully yours in Christ,

+ Bishop Paul J. Bradley