

*Please note that we are re-running reflections from the last B cycle (2018).*

[Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time \(B\)](#)

1 Kgs 19:4-8

Ps 34:2-9

Eph 4:30-5:2

John 6:41-51

*By Dianne Bergant, CSA*

How does one preach about the bread of heaven to those who have been deprived of the bread of earth? First glance at today's readings might not be very helpful in this regard. The first reading tells of Elijah who, in fear of his life, ran into the wilderness. There, an angel of the LORD woke him to food and drink. Just how many hungry people have been brought food by angels? In the gospel reading, the people challenge Jesus' claim that, as the true bread from heaven, he is greater than the heavenly bread Moses gave their ancestors in the wilderness. These people had not complained when earlier Jesus provided bread for the multitude. In neither situation were the people really in desperate need of bread. The prophet required strength to overcome his fear of Jezebel (1 Kgs 19:2-3); the people at the time of Jesus could do with nourishment because they had followed him without food for a day or so, hoping to witness some miraculous feat (John 6:2). In no way might such need for nourishment compare with life-threatening hunger. So, how is one to preach?

Perhaps the message of these readings is really meant for those of us who are not hungry. We might judge the prophet to be cowardly and lacking in trust in God. Still, his needs were met. Furthermore, they were met, not because he deserved relief, but because God cared for him through the ministrations of an angel. Is this not the way we are called to minister? To serve those in need, regardless of whether or not we think they are deserving, whether or not they worship as we believe God should be worshipped (Jezebel's rage toward Elijah stemmed from his conflict with the religious functionaries of Baal – 1 Kgs 19:1-2), whether or not they fall under the protection of our laws (Jezebel was the wife of King Ahaz and operated with his authority.)

Jesus' response to those who challenged his bread of life discourse is both profound and encouraging. It describes his intimate relationship with God and our own participation in that relationship. It promises eternal life to all those who believe, to all those who partake of the bread that is his flesh. The marvels of this message cannot be adequately described. However, how might they impact the lives of those who go hungry? The 'good news' of the gospel must do more than encourage them to trust in God and hope for a better life. The admonition from James comes to mind: "...one of you says

to them, 'Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well,' but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? (Jas 2:16).

Today's ministers would do well to follow Jesus' example. He preached his sermon after he met their immediate needs.

Pope Francis argues that by virtue of our baptism, we are all missionary disciples (*Evangelii Gaudium* #120). That means that all of us are called to meet the physical needs of those who hunger. Perhaps the time of Sunday's homily should be used for congregational signing up to feed the hungry in the parish, in the neighborhood, in the country, in the world.

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