

THE NINETEENTH SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME, Year B

1 Kgs 19:4-8; Ps 34:2-3,4-5,6-7,8-9; Eph 4:30-5:2; Jn 6:41-51

A CAKE AND JUG OF WATER A DAY EUCHARIST AT LEAST ONCE A WEEK

Homily by Fr. Michael A. Van Sloun

Saturday, August 11, 2018, 5:00 p.m. Mass

Sunday, August 12, 2018, 8:30 and 10:30 a.m. Masses

The **Eucharist extravaganza** continues.

This is **Week Three** of a five week series on the Eucharist.

It is good that we give the **Eucharist** so much **attention**.

It is the **most important sacrament**.

It is the **source** and **summit** of the **Christian life** (*Lumen Gentium*, No. 11).

Let's **set the table** with the **first reading**.

We **begin** with the prophet **Elijah**.

He lived in the **Ninth Century BC** (c. 870 to 845 BC), almost **3000 years ago**.

The first reading mentions that he was making a **journey**,

but it does **not** give us very **much information** about the journey.

His journey was **no easy deal**.

Let's do some **Mid-East geography**.

The **journey started** at Mount **Carmel** (1 Kgs 18:19,20),

which is modern-day **Haifa**,

the third largest city in Israel after Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

It is a **port city** on the **Mediterranean coast**.

It is in the **northern part** of the **country**,

about fifteen miles south of the border with Lebanon.

Elijah was headed for **Mount Horeb** (1 Kgs 19:8),

another name for **Mount Sinai**, which is on the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula

which belongs to **modern-day Egypt**.

And he was making the **trip on foot across** some pretty **rugged terrain**.

Maybe you have done some **hiking** or **backpacking**.

Try this trip on for size!

Elijah went by foot down the **Kishon River Valley** to **Jezreel**,

which is **fairly easy** going, about **30 miles**.

From **Jezreel**, it was **south** through the **highlands of Samaria**,

to **Bethel**, and then to **Jerusalem**, **marching up** and **down the hills**, about **60 miles**.

Then Elijah continued southward, from **Jerusalem** to **Beersheba** (1 Kgs 19:3),

almost all **barren desert**,

extremely hot, rocky road, uneven footing, **another 60 miles**

(see Brisco, T. V., *Holman Bible Atlas*, 130).

The plan was to **continue to Mount Horeb/Sinai**.
The trip was going to get far **more difficult**.
It would be **blazing desert** the rest of the way.
The **terrain** would get much more challenging,
far **more mountainous**.
It was a **long haul** from **Beersheba** to **Sinai**,
over 200 miles as the crow flies,
rocky trails with **steep climbs** and **switchbacks**.

Elijah was **hungry** and **dehydrated**,
tired out and **fed up**.
Elijah was ready to **dump the trip**.
He had had **enough** (1 Kgs 19:4).

Then an **angel** has the nerve to show up,
brought him a **hearth cake** and a **jug of water** (1 Kgs 19:6),
and was saying, in effect,
“You’ve got over **200 miles left**.
It is going to be **slow going**, only five or six miles a day.
It is going to take about **forty days** (1 Kgs 19:8),
about **six weeks**,
so **get up, eat up, drink up, and get on the move**” (adaptation, 1 Kgs 19:5,7).

Elijah was **sick of being tired**.
He’d already been on the road for **several weeks**.
And I’d bet that he was **feeling** very **irritable**.
I can just hear him **complaining**,
“I’ve got **six more weeks** to go and you give me a hearth **cake** and jug of **water**.
You have got to be **kidding**.
It **won’t last** a day.”

Where would Elijah **get food** and **drink** on this long trip?
There were no farms, grocery stores, or restaurants along the way.
God would never send Elijah on a journey like this without providing
the food and water that he would need.
What the reading tells us is that the **angel came that day** (1 Kgs 19:5,7).
The reading does not tell us what happened for the **next forty days**.
Was the hearth **cake super food**?
Was it so **miraculous** that if he **ate it once** he was **good** for the next **forty days**?
Probably not.
It is much more likely that the **angel brought him food every day**,
just like **God fed** the **Israelites** in the desert with **manna every day** (Ex 16:4,12-15).
So there was **not one** hearth **cake**.
The angel brought a **cake every day**.
There was **not one** jug of **water**.
The angel brought a jug of **water every day**.

God provided Elijah what he needed to make his journey,
and **God provides us** with what we need to make our journeys.
Some days our **journey is easy going**, like along the Kishon River valley,
and some days our **journey is a tough climb**, like through Samaria or Sinai.

Jesus will never leave us hanging.
Jesus will **never leave us hungry or thirsty** (see Jn 6:35).

Jesus offers us spiritual food,
not a hearth cake, but **bread** – consecrated – his **Body**,
and not a jug of water, but a cup of **wine** – consecrated – his **Blood**.

Elijah ate every day.
How often should we receive the Eucharist?

The Church says that the **norm** or **expectation** is **once a week**,
every Sunday, or every weekend.
Otherwise the **journey** will be **too long** for us (see 1 Kgs 19:7).

It is **unfortunate** that our **Mass attendance** is called “the **Sunday obligation**”
(*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 2180, 2181; Canon 1247).
It should **not** be something that we **have to do**;
it should be something that we **want to do**.
Actually, it is something that we **cannot live without**.
The Eucharist is **rich banquet** of **sacramental grace**.

My **heart aches** over so **many who go without**.

There are **some** who have **left the Church**.
People leave because they **undervalue** or **underestimate** the **power** of the **Eucharist**.
Spiritually, a person **cannot survive**, cannot **prosper**, **without it**.
If this was well **understood**, it would be **impossible to leave**.

There are **inactive Catholics** or **occasional Catholics**,
who receive the **Eucharist** a **couple times a year**, like Christmas and Easter,
or every few months, or once a month.
Occasional Catholics **miss** the **Eucharist** more often than not.
They suffer **spiritual malnutrition**.
It is **critical** to **receive** the **Eucharist**, and to do so **regularly**, **weekly**,
otherwise the **journey** will be **too long** (1 Kgs 19:7).

My heart aches over those who go without.
But **my heart rejoices over you**
because you have made it a **priority to be fed**,
fed with God’s holy **Word** (see Dt 8:3),
and fed with the **Sacrament** his **Body** and **Blood** (see Jn 6:55).

Let's review the **Church's teaching** on **how often** to go to **Holy Communion**.

There is a norm, a minimum, and a maximum.

The norm is **once a week**, the **Sunday obligation**

(*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 2180, 2181; Canon 1247).

The minimum is **once a year**, the **Easter Duty** (Canon 920).

The maximum is **once a day**, for those who go to daily Mass

(*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 1389).

Here's a question:

Is it **permissible** for a person to go to **Communion more than once a day?**

The Church says "**No**,"

unless a person gets **permission** from their **Pastor**.

The **reason** for "once a day" is to **prevent** an **unbalanced approach**.

For a few individuals, if the Eucharist is good once,

twice is better, and three times is even better.

A few people have gone to **Mass after Mass**,

8:00, 9:30, 11:00 and 6:00 p.m.

to **receive Holy Communion over and over** again,

because, in their minds, **more is better**.

The Church teaches that **once Jesus has come** to a person in the **Eucharist**,

that person is **fed** and **satisfied for the day**.

There are **exceptions** to this,

exceptions that are **appropriate** and **sensible**.

There are occasions when a person attends **two Masses** on the **same day**

for **two separate good reasons**.

An example would be a **Sunday Mass** in the morning

followed by a **Confirmation Mass** in the afternoon.

Another example would be a **daily Mass** in the morning

followed by a **funeral Mass** or a **wedding Mass**.

When a person attends two Masses for two separate good reasons

the Church encourages the person to **participate fully** in **each Mass**

and to **receive Holy Communion each time**.

The **Eucharist** is all about **food for the journey**.

The prophet **Elijah** made a long **journey** from **Beersheba to Horeb**,

and God fed him with hearth cakes and jugs of water.

We are on the **journey of life**.

It is a **spiritual journey**,

and **Jesus** is **offering** us **bread from heaven**,

his Body, the Eucharist.

We had best get up, **take and eat**,

and do so **at least once a week**,

else the **journey** will be **too long** for us (1 Kgs 19:7)