

19th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B, August 12th, 2018

1 Kings 19:4-8

We are told in previous chapters of this book that Ahab, the ruler of Israel, 1) did more evil than any of his predecessors (16:30), 2) did more to anger the Lord than any other king (16:33), and 3) he married the pagan, Jezebel, and went over to Paganism (16:31). Then in chapter 18, there was a contest between Ahab, who represents Baal, and Elijah, who represents the Lord, to see who can produce rain. Baal, the god of rain, does nothing. Then Elijah has the wood doused with water and prays. The sacrifice is consumed. The bystanders know the truth and help him slay the 450 prophets of Baal. A tiny cloud appears and gives an enormous rain. When Jezebel hears about the success of Elijah, she orders his death. Elijah then flees into the desert, where we now find him praying for death.

4Elijah went a day's journey into the desert, until he came to a broom tree and sat beneath it. He prayed for death saying: "This is enough, O Lord! Take my life, for I am no better than my fathers." Since Jezebel has apparently canceled his long and arduous campaign to turn Israel back to Yahweh, Elijah is in despair and begs God to take him. God, however, will both comfort and strengthen his prophet.¹

5He lay down and fell asleep under the broom tree, This was a white blossomed broom or juniper bush, the largest in the desert, which gave shade from the sun, wind, and rain.⁵ **but then an angel** Angels appear often in the course of biblical history—to protect individuals, to guide the people in the desert, or to inform people of God's plans. Now, an angel comes to the prophet's help.² **touched him and ordered him to get up and eat.** This food was not an option, it was not an extra, it was essential. It is the same with Communion.²

6Elijah looked and there at his head was a hearth cake This was a simple patty of dough that was baked on hot stones.⁶ **and a jug of water. After he ate and drank, he lay down again,**
7but the angel of the Lord came back a second time, touched him, and ordered, "Get up and eat, else the journey will be too long for you!"

8He got up, ate, and drank; then strengthened both physically and spiritually by that food, God does not ask more of us than God's grace enables us to bear.³ **he walked forty days and forty nights** This was a foreshadowing of Jesus' fast of forty days and forty nights as well as the foreshadowing of the sacrament of the Eucharist. The experience of Elijah parallels the experience of all who receive the "bread that comes down from heaven" that we hear about in the gospel.⁴ **to the mountain of God, Horeb.** The distance is about 300 miles which Elijah could have traveled in much less than 40 days.¹ These numbers may be quoted to make a parallel to Moses' time on the mountain (Ex. 24:18f). Forty, in Hebrew numerology, is the number associated with trial, testing, a time of change, a generation.¹⁷ Horeb is another name for Mt. Sinai.¹ Like Moses and Jesus, Elijah fasted for 40 days and 40 nights.⁷ Moses and Elijah appeared with Christ at the time of his Transfiguration. (Mt. 17:3)

Ephesians 4:30-5:2

Brothers and sisters:

30Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, This is a negative command, a warning to avoid sin and the occasions that lead to it. Paul is thinking primarily of destructive speech that disrupts unity and

fellowship in the body of Christ.¹⁰ Paul is basically telling us that we can grieve the Holy Spirit by the way we live our lives.⁷ Since we are one body, any offense against a fellow member is an offense against the Holy Spirit.¹⁷ **with which you were sealed for the day of redemption.** “The day of redemption” means that our bodies will be redeemed at the General Resurrection.¹⁰ The Holy Spirit dwells in the souls of believers from Baptism onwards and his presence is reinforced when they receive Confirmation and the other sacraments. St. Ambrose, commenting on the effects of Confirmation, says that the soul receives from the Holy Spirit THE SPIRITUAL SEAL, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and fortitude, the Spirit of knowledge and piety, the Spirit of holy fear. God the Father has been impressed on your heart.”⁸ Confirmation is one of the three sacraments, which imprints an indelible character on the soul, the others are Baptism and Holy Orders. These can never be repeated.¹¹ (CCC 1121) The seal of the Holy Spirit marks our total belonging to Christ, our enrollment in his service for ever, *as well as the promise of divine protection in the great trial at the end of the world*”¹¹ (CCC 1296) When the time came for Israel’s redemption from slavery in Egypt, the blood of the Passover lamb, which had been smeared on the doors of the Israelites’ houses, acted as the mark which identified those to be saved. In a parallel way, the seal of the Holy Spirit, which is given at Baptism, is the permanent sign engraved on the souls of those who are called to salvation by virtue of the Redemption worked by Christ.⁸ Whoever bears the seal is under the protection of the owner of the seal.¹⁷

31All bitterness, long standing resentment **fury,** both long-lived and sudden bursts **anger,** wrath or anger that seeks retribution **shouting and reviling must be removed from you, along with all malice.** This is a list of vices.¹⁷ Paul is telling us that we can grieve the Holy Spirit by the way we live our lives. He warns us against foul language, meanness, quarrels, harsh words and bad attitudes. Once we deeply believe in the overwhelming, unconditional love that God has for us, our love for each other becomes a spontaneous response. The greatest lovers are those who realize how much they have been loved.⁴

32And be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another as God has forgiven you in Christ. This is a positive command. This is a list of virtues.¹⁷ The law of Christ is summed up in love and forgiveness. They both are decisions and it is a sign to all that Christ is really present in us when through the power of the Spirit we decide to love and decide to forgive.⁷ Forgiveness is one of the virtues which characterize the “new nature” for it leads a person to treat his neighbor as Jesus taught. Our Lord has shown by his own example what really forgiving one’s neighbor involves. Even in the midst of his suffering on the cross he asked his father to forgive those who condemned him and those who nailed him to the wood so violently and sadistically. Blessed Jose Escriva encourages us to “Force yourself, if necessary, always to forgive those who offend you, from the very first moment. For the greatest injury or offence that you can suffer from them is as nothing compared with what God has pardoned you.”⁸

5:1So be imitators of God, as beloved children, A good child tries to please his parents and to follow their good example. Christians are adopted children of God and therefore should be guided in their behavior by the way God treats people.⁸

2and live in love, as Christ loved us and handed himself over for us as a sacrificial offering This recalls the requirements of the Old Covenant and underlines the sacrificial character of Christ’s death. Escriva commented on these first two verses: “Reflect on the example that Christ gave us, from the crib in Bethlehem to his throne on Calvary. Think of his self-denial and of all he went through—hunger, thirst, weariness, heat, tiredness, ill-treatment, misunderstandings, tears. But at the same time think of his joy at being able to save all mankind.” Now engrave deeply on your mind

and on your heart these two verses, which are a summary that St. Paul made for the Ephesians when he invited them to follow resolutely in our Lord's footsteps.⁸ We share in Christ's priestly ministry by offering to the Father acceptable sacrifices of our time, talents, and treasures in the liturgy of everyday life.¹⁰ **to God for a fragrant aroma.** This means that Christ's obedience was pleasing to God the Father. The idea that an offering that is accepted by God has a pleasing odor is used some 50 times in the Old Testament.⁹

John 6:41-51

This section really has two parts that begin with 6:35 and continue through 6:47, which is an invitation to faith. Jesus says that "I am the bread of life." This is followed by a string of invitations to come to Jesus and BELIEVE in him for salvation. Then in 6:48-58 we have the invitation to the Eucharist and it likewise begins with the statement, "I am the bread of life." This is followed by a string of invitations to EAT the flesh of Jesus and DRINK his blood. These are two parts of one sermon since without faith we can neither be united with Christ nor recognize his presence in the Eucharist. If eating is believing in 6:35-47, then believing leads to eating in 6:48-58.¹²

41The Jews In the Gospel of John, this term is often used to denote representatives of Judaism, its leadership.¹⁷ **murmured** This recalls how the Israelites complained against the Lord and Moses in the wilderness.¹² **about Jesus because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven,"** There are three of these "I am" sayings in today's reading. They are statements of the divinity of Christ that reflect the encounter that Moses had with God in the burning bush in Ex. 3 where God tells Moses: "This is what you shall tell the Israelites: I AM sent me to you."

42and they said, "Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph?" This is John's second and last mention of St. Joseph.¹³ **Do we not know his father and mother?** They rejected Christ because they judged him by human standards. We can reject or deny the message by rejecting the messenger.⁷ **Then how can he say, 'I have come down from heaven'?"**

43Jesus answered and said to them, "Stop murmuring among yourselves.

44No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him, Jesus is saying, "If you believe that I have been sent by God, no further signs are necessary because you possess God's grace. If you don't believe I have been sent by God, no matter what signs I perform you won't do as I tell you because you lack the grace."¹⁷ **and I will raise him on the last day.** Again the promise of resurrection. This does not mean that all that is necessary is to "Accept Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior" and you will be saved. Salvation results not only from belief, but believing so deeply that you act on that belief and "Do whatever He tells you" (John 2:5).¹⁷

45It is written in the prophets: 'They shall all be taught by God.' This is a paraphrase of Isaiah 54:13 where Isaiah envisions the messianic age as a time when Yahweh will restore, prosper, and teach the children of Israel.¹² Jeremiah 31:34 also says that "No longer will they have need to teach their friends and kinsmen how to know the Lord. All, from least to greatest, shall know me, says the Lord, for I will forgive their evildoing and remember their sin no more." **Everyone who listens to my Father and learns from him comes to me.** This refers to God's Revelation through the prophets and especially through Jesus Christ.¹³ It is necessary that the believer answer God's grace with a willing disposition.¹

46Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. Men can know God the Father only through Jesus Christ, because only he has seen the Father, whom he has come to reveal to us.¹³

47Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life.

48I am the bread of life. If Christ were not really present under the species of bread and wine, this discourse would make absolutely no sense. But if his real presence in the Eucharist is accepted on faith, then his meaning is quite clear and we can see how infinite and tender his love for us is. In the Eucharist nothing is left of the bread and the wine but the appearances alone. Beneath these appearances Christ is present whole and entire. The Fathers of the Church have issued frequent warning to the faithful that when they consider this august sacrament, they are not to be satisfied with the senses which announce the properties of bread and wine. They should rather assent to the words of Christ: these are of such power that they change and transform the bread and the wine into his body and blood. The reason for this, as the same Fathers say more than once, is that the power which performs this action is the same power of Almighty God that created the whole universe out of nothing at the beginning of time.¹³

49Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert, The manna during the Exodus was a figure of this Bread—Jesus Christ himself—which nourishes Christians on their pilgrimage through this world.¹³ **but they died;** This refers to physical death but the next verse refers to spiritual death.¹⁵

50this is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat it and not die. We believe that the souls of all who die in Christ's grace are the People of God beyond death. On the day of resurrection, death will be definitively conquered, when these souls will be reunited with their bodies.¹¹ (CCC 1052)

51I am the living bread that came down from heaven; This happened at the Incarnation when Jesus actually came down to earth in the city of Bethlehem which literally means "the city of bread."¹⁴

whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give The future tense points both to the Cross where Jesus surrenders his life for human sins, and to the eucharistic liturgy where Jesus offers himself as living bread to a starving world.¹² **is my flesh** This is the word that is used for "body." **for the life of the world."** In some sacrifices of the Old Testament, which were a figure of the sacrifice of Christ, part of the animal offered up was later used for food, signifying participation in the sacred rite. So, by receiving Holy Communion, we are sharing in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.¹³ The Church draws her life from Christ in the Eucharist; by him she is fed and by him she is enlightened. Whenever the Church celebrates the Eucharist, the faithful can in some way relive the experience of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus: "Their eyes were opened and they *recognized* him."¹⁶

Some of the material for this commentary is taken from: (1) "The Jerome Biblical Commentary," (2) "The Navarre Bible: Joshua—Kings," (3) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers:1997" by Lawrence E. Mick, (4) "Workbook for lectors and gospel readers:2005" by Aelred R. Rosser, (5) "Smith's Bible Dictionary," (6) "Manners and Customs of Bible Lands" by Fred H. Wight, (7) "The Bread of Life Catholic Bible Study" by Deacon Ken and Marie Finn, (8) "The Navarre Bible: Captivity Epistles," (9) "The Letters To The Galatians And Ephesians" by William Barclay, (10) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Letters of St. Paul to the Galatians & Ephesians" With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (11) "Catechism Of The Catholic Church," (12) "Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of John," (13) "The Navarre Bible: St. John" (14) "Catholic Bible Study: John" by Stephen K. Ray (15) "The Gospel According To John" by Raymond E. Brown, (16) "Ecclesia de Eucharistia" which is the encyclical of Pope John Paul II on the Eucharist as the Heart of the Church, and (17) The St. Paul Center For Biblical Theology Online Founded By Dr. Scott Hahn.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.