

Homily for the 19th Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 11-12, 2018

Readings: 1 Kings 19:4-8, Ps. 34, Eph. 4:30-5:2, John 6:41-51

Preacher: Irene Goodwin

Some years ago I listened to a homily on John's Bread of Life readings. The homilist reminisced about being in Belgium at Christmas time. A friend brought him to his home to celebrate the holy day. On Christmas morning the family was gathered around the dining room table. His friend's mother came into the room with a Christmas stollen. Immediately he was brought back to Christmas mornings with his family.

Since I needed to prepare a homily for the following Sunday, I began to think about the wonderful customs many ethnic groups have around Christmas and Easter. I thought my family had no such customs. I did remember that they told me that the Christmas tree did not go up until they were in bed and they often got oranges in their stockings. We didn't follow those customs.

However, as I was contemplating this, I remembered that in her 50s my mother began baking Irish soda bread. Evidently it was bread from her journey. I went to the library to look for an Irish cookbook. I found none. Finally I found some recipes on-line. I made Irish soda bread and inflicted it on my family time and time again. I finally found a good recipe for Irish soda bread and it has become bread for *my* journey.

Our readings today are about bread. Bread is a symbol of life in all cultures, a symbol of all that sustains us. Elijah had worked hard to bring people to God and then he was being hunted down by his enemies. He is tired and ready to die. Two times an angel appeared and brought him food. Finally the angel said, "Get up and eat or else the journey will be too long for you."

In the Gospel we continue John's bread of life readings. Jesus tells the crowd He is bread from heaven. The crowd does not quite like that. He tells them this bread is not like the manna, which did not keep them from dying. Jesus says that those who eat true bread will never die. Then he says, "This bread I will give is my flesh for the life of the world." Why would Jesus refer to this bread as His flesh?

It disturbed the people around him and continues to disturb many. Jesus must have known that this was a difficult a concept. Perhaps Jesus was trying to create a way to remind people over and over again that He is always present among us. Most of us grew up learning that God was everywhere. What we seem to have difficulty getting is that God is in us. Just two weeks ago we read in Ephesians, "One Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all and *in all*."

Jesus wants us to know God is in us, in our friends, in our family and in our enemies. This presence of God is most evident in communities. Even on the evening before His death, Jesus prayed all would be one. In today's second reading Paul is telling the Ephesians as a community not to "grieve the Holy Spirit but to be imitators of Christ." When we gather as a community the bread of life transforms us into a people who live by the Spirit. How do we live in the Spirit? Paul writes that we put away bitterness, resentment, anger and malice and we are told to be compassionate and forgiving.

It is easy to argue and grumble over Jesus words. What is important is that Jesus gave us food for the journey. Go live as if we are one in Christ. It is in loving communities where we best see nourishment from the bread of life lived out. It is from our communities that we are sent to go out into the world to give love away to the poor, hungry, lonely, immigrants, refugees, the sick, the dying, to friends, neighbors and to enemies.

One example might be several weeks ago when men and women from across the world went to Thailand to try to save 13 young Buddhists. When everyone was safe one Thai Seal said, "We are not sure if this is a miracle, a science or what. All the 13 Wild Boars are now out of the cave." I do not know what the motivation was for many to risk their lives. For weeks these strangers from across the world became a community that planned, strategized, prayed and planned again. They did not rest until all were safe. I have to believe God was in their midst saying to them and to us, get up and eat for the journey is long.