

**19<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**August 8-9, 2009**  
**St. John the Evangelist Parish**  
**Deacon James J. Benjamin**

*I Kings 19:4-8 Psalm 34 Ephesians 4: 30-5:2 John 6: 41-51*

We live in a rational, scientific age.  
For three centuries or more  
we have gotten used to thinking in terms of evidence  
and believing what we can see, touch and feel.  
We are raised in a culture that is skeptical  
about anything that cannot be proven in a scientific experiment.  
We can't help thinking and acting in this way;  
our culture forms us to be rational and skeptical.  
And it's not a bad thing to look for evidence and proof  
before we make decisions.  
By being careful and insisting on good reasons for making choices  
we can avoid making foolish mistakes and being led astray.

However too much reliance on believing only  
in what we can observe with our senses  
can lead to problems in our spiritual life.  
For example, a shocking number of Catholics,  
when asked in a recent poll  
about whether they believed in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist,  
responded that they did not.  
Their rational minds could not allow them to acknowledge  
that their God loved them so much  
that he desired to come to them as their food and drink.  
According to them, "what you see is what you get."  
Eucharist is just a wafer of bread, nothing more.

The Gospel today challenges that way of thinking  
because it asks us to choose what we cannot see  
and believe in what cannot be proven in a scientific experiment.  
Jesus makes some extraordinary claims about who he is,  
where he has come from  
and what his life is all about.

"I am the bread of life," he says.  
He tells the crowd that anyone who eats this bread will live forever.  
"Everyone who has heard the Father... comes to me," he also says.  
And he claims that the bread that he is, is food for the entire world.

This Gospel asks us to consider what we believe regarding these statements.

And then, perhaps more important,  
what is our response?  
Does the bread of life change us for the better,  
or do we just say we believe and then go about our business as usual?

Jesus' statements are certainly too much for the people of his day to believe.  
But what about you and me?  
Are they too much for us too?  
If we say we believe, then what does this Gospel today  
reveal to us about who we really are and who Jesus really is?

For the Jews who were listening to him that day,  
Jesus was someone they knew.  
They knew where he came from; they knew his parents and his family.  
How could he presume to have come down from heaven?  
How could he dare to tell them that he was "living bread?"  
They could see very well with their eyes  
that he was the same Jesus they had always known.  
And so they murmured...and doubted.

This reading challenges us to take a good look at our faith.  
We are here today because God has drawn us here.  
We listen to the words of Jesus because we sense that they are the key to eternal life.

But do we really believe that God wants to inhabit us,  
fill us with his very substance, change us, transform us,  
make us more holy as he is holy?  
Where do you and I come down on the faith-statement  
that the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ is our essential food  
for the long journey to heaven,  
just as the hearth cake and water was Elijah's food for his long journey?  
Can you and I really get our minds around this meaning  
of the bread of life for us,  
or is it just too much?

We're reflecting on what it might mean  
when we do take the stand of faith,  
that we believe with our hearts and minds that Jesus really *is*  
the bread of life,  
that he *is* the one from God,  
who has seen God,  
and who reveals God to us.

It isn't so difficult, perhaps, to believe in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist  
as long as we don't ask what that faith statement means for our lives.  
It's possible to consider the Eucharist as,

somehow, not connected very closely to us, a sort of isolated fact.  
The Gospel today puts before us that opportunity  
to look at what and who Jesus is,  
and what the Eucharist is,  
so that we can move to a newer and deeper level of faith.  
If Jesus really fills us with his life each Sunday,  
and has been doing so for all the years we have been coming to Mass,  
then our lives should reflect that growing presence of God within us.

Just as Jesus gives himself for the life of the world,  
so too are you and I to give ourselves for the life of the world.  
Disciples follow the Master.  
Trying to live out our faith in that way  
doesn't make much sense in the eyes of the world.  
Our culture says, put yourselves first.  
It tells us to amass as much money and material goods as we can  
because that's all that is important.  
Winning over others, dominating them and coming out on top  
is all that counts in today's world.

And to this powerful cultural force,  
we say there is more that is important than this.  
Our faith tells us that living as generous and other-directed people  
matters more than the size of the house we live in  
or the number of vacations we can afford each year.

Our faith informs us that the way in which we care for others  
will produce more satisfaction and more joy  
than if we exclusively care for ourselves.  
But you can't prove that on scientific grounds.  
Faith doesn't operate by proof or by evidence.  
It isn't a thing we can touch, feel or see,  
but it is real nonetheless.

Jesus always is leading us to make that jump that faith requires.  
He always invites us to let go a little more  
of our desire to be anchored to our senses and our common sense,  
and let go into greater faith in him.

What would that leap of faith mean for each one of us?  
Where do we draw the limits now  
on our call to be bread for the life of the world?

Maybe we limit ourselves to taking care of our immediate family.  
Maybe we extend ourselves at times  
to those who are in our neighborhood

or in our nation,  
to those who look like we do,  
or who believe the way we do.  
We all have limits of some kind  
and the Gospel today invites us to break down some of those barriers.

Our Church is for everyone.  
Jesus gave his disciples the mission to baptize everyone.  
No limits there;  
no one who is left out.

The Real Presence of Christ inhabits us  
and will inhabit us again in a few minutes,  
when we line up to receive the bread and wine  
that has been consecrated for our food for the journey.  
Jesus continues to breathe his life into us  
so that we can breathe life into others.  
Can we prove that this is true? No.  
Can we live this way, letting our growing faith animate and inspire us?  
Yes. Can you and I be more and more the bread of life for the world?  
Let us pray that we can.