

## 19th Sunday in Ordinary Time



Over the past few weeks of the liturgical year, the Lectionary has been regaling us with similar stories of miraculous nourishment:

- the 20 loaves Elisha used to feed 100 people,
- the manna sent by God to the Israelites,
- the little hearth-cake that sustained Elijah all the way to Mount Horeb,
- the five loaves and two fishes Jesus used to feed the crowd.
- And (today) Jesus declares himself to be the Bread of Life.

All this is an extended opportunity for all of us to ponder the Eucharist that ,consciously or unconsciously, continues to influence us.

The Lord says, “everybody who believes **has** eternal life”. Let us bring before him our lack of faith, knowing that he is rich in mercy.

### **1 Kings 19:4-8**

Elijah, afraid for his life and discouraged, prays to die but God has other plans for him.

### **Ephesians 4:30 – 5:2**

We should get rid of all negativity and, instead, try to imitate Jesus’ love and forgiveness.

### **John 6:41-51**

Jesus is the bread of life, come down from heaven for the eternal life of all who eat of it.



The bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world".

The people claimed to know where Jesus came from: his human origin; but they did not understand his divine origin. Because Jesus declared: "I am the bread that came down from heaven", they murmured against him. In a similar way, their ancestors grumbled against Moses when they were hungry on their exodus journey through the desert, and he fed them with "bread from heaven". The bread in the wilderness was only a foretaste of the true bread, Jesus, who came from God, his Heavenly Father. The Israelites had eaten the manna in the desert, but they all died. Jesus was the life-giving bread who eternally sustained the people who believed in him. Everyone who responds to God's grace and believes in Jesus had the fullness of divine revelation. By partaking of this "living bread", God's people would be nourished by Jesus who would sustain them on life's journey for eternity.



In last Sunday's Gospel Jesus declared to the crowd of people at Capernaum that he is the "bread of life." Today's Gospel picks up on their response; they react with utter disbelief. Notice how John, who wrote this Gospel, refers now to the crowd as "the Jews." Not politically correct these days, but John is using the phrase as a sort of shorthand for all the people who resist the message of Jesus. These are the people who "complain" about him because of what he said.

"Complain" is exactly the same verb used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament to describe Israelites grumbling in the wilderness during the Exodus. The crowd who resist Jesus shows the same stubbornness as their ancestors. They find it difficult to accept that Jesus has indeed "come down from heaven."

This idea (of coming down from heaven) is mentioned five times in this 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of John,

The Exodus manna came down from heaven. But Jesus is the true bread descended from heaven which is God's gift to the world. The people reject this because they claim they know Jesus' parentage. Again John is playing with the idea of misunderstanding. They reject Jesus because they claim to know his (human) origins. In fact, they are oblivious to his true origins.

Jesus tells the crowd to stop their complaining. Yet instead of dealing with their issues, he talks about two important themes — about how God draws people to Jesus and about the resurrection on the last day. Talking about those two themes, he quotes the OT prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah. In this way Jesus gathers a list of witnesses (God, Isaiah and Jeremiah) who bear testimony to the truth of what he is saying. For Jesus, God is offering a precious teaching to the world. But only people who hear what God is saying and listen to that message will come to Jesus. Jesus is telling the crowd that God is teaching them something, but since they won't listen, they learn nothing. Yet even the ones who do learn from the Father have never seen him. It is only

through Jesus that anyone can come to the Father, hear God's teaching, and, therefore, learn.

The final section of the reading begins with Jesus' expression "I tell you most solemnly" which always means Jesus is going to say something particularly important. And so it is. Jesus re-states that he is the bread of life. He then says that "your ancestors," certainly ate manna - but they eventually died. On the other hand, the people who eat the bread Jesus offers will not only be satisfied but, what's more, they'll receive the gift of eternal life.

Jesus takes the idea of eating one step further. He once again re-states that he is the "living bread which has come down from heaven" and then anyone will be a person who lives forever.

He finishes with a dramatic and shocking twist. The "bread" he's been talking about is, he says, his "flesh," which he will give "for the life of the world."

The word "flesh" has got a lot of shades of meaning. The Word, we're told became **flesh** out of love for us in the mystery of the Incarnation. Out of that same love Jesus will give up his **flesh**, his body, his life, by dying on the cross. Finally, the idea of eating the flesh of Jesus prepares us for his teaching on the Eucharist, which we would normally have in next Sunday's Gospel. It is, however, the feast of the Assumption of our Blessed Lady – so we have to wait another three years – or read it privately ourselves.

I must say I look forward to these summer Sundays in Year B when we read the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of John. The text is a rich tapestry of highly complex theological concepts and biblical allusions. Like a lot of people, I'm challenged first of all to understand the text and then to try to get it over with any confidence.


It's actually easier said than done! At the same time when we get past the rather abstract intricacy and wealth of Biblical allusion, the text does say something that is both simple and profound.

**God, whom we have never seen, loves us. The consequence of the Father's love is his desire that we should live forever in his presence. It was out of this amazing love for us that God sent Jesus into the world. All we've got to do is to come to Jesus with faith and receive what he offers with trust.**

Then what he wants for us will happen.

### GOSPEL WORDSEARCH

P	O	T	S	A	I	R	E	T	S	JEWS
S	E	W	N	J	S	E	S	W	E	FATHER
F	E	N	D	E	D	H	I	R	F	MOTHER
J	A	V	N	A	W	T	A	S	I	DRAWN
M	S	T	E	H	P	O	R	P	L	PROPHETS
A	L	R	H	I	T	M	A	D	E	HEAR
D	B	E	R	E	L	E	A	R	N	LEARN
E	A	S	W	A	R	E	S	A	E	BELIEVES
R	N	E	V	A	E	H	B	W	S	MANNA
B	A	D	D	E	A	H	E	N	T	DESERT
										DEAD
										LIFE





**WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 11 Feast of Saint Clare, virgin**

Clare was the eldest daughter of Favorino Scifi, a wealthy member of an ancient Roman family in Assisi. From her earliest years Clare was devoted to prayer and to practices of mortification, and as she passed into girlhood her yearning for a more spiritual life increased.

She was eighteen years of age when Saint Francis came to preach in the church of San Giorgio at Assisi. Francis kindled a flame in the heart of Clare, and she begged him to help her live "after the manner of the holy Gospel". By Francis's advice, Clare secretly left her father's house, and, accompanied by her aunt Bianca and another companion, proceeded to the chapel of the Portiuncula, where Francis and his brothers met her. Clare then laid aside her rich dress, and Francis cut off her hair and clothed her in a rough tunic and a thick veil, and in this way she vowed herself to the service of Jesus Christ.

Eventually, Clare founded the Order of Poor Ladies ("Poor Clares") at San Damiano, and led it for 40 years. Clare's mother and sisters later joined the order, and today there are thousands of members living lives of prayer in silence.