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August 11, 2018

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Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

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1 Kings 19:4-8

Psalms 34

Ephesians 4:30-5:2

John 6:41-51

Search your prayer books, meditate on all 20 mysteries of the rosary and comb through novenas and chaplets. Nowhere will you find the suggestion that you pray like Elijah does in today's first reading. He was basically telling God, "Enough! I've had it! Just let me lie down and die! *Here and now!*"

The fact that spiritual tomes don't copy that prayer for us to memorize or create hymns from it doesn't diminish the crystal quality of its honesty or the witness it bears to the profound relationship Elijah maintained with the God who had called him into a life of prophecy.

When we find the "Thy will be done" of the Lord's Prayer too hard to pray, perhaps we can echo Elijah's cry and trust that God hears that prayer with compassion.

After praying, Elijah lay down, perhaps hoping never to awaken. But God's lovers don't get off so easily. Elijah had hardly gotten into deep sleep before God's messenger shook him awake and told him to eat. When Elijah tried to return to the sleep of the just, the angel told him to finish off the provisions God had sent because he needed energy for the road ahead.

That long road would first take Elijah to Mount Horeb where God would appear to him. Later, it led him to where he would anoint Elisha as his successor and finally to where he would be carried off to heaven in a chariot of fire (2 Kings 2:11). According to the story, the one thing God did not do for Elijah was allow him to die.

Elijah's story seems to teach that God listens to the prayers of the beloved and answers by beckoning them toward all that life can offer. This is the message Jesus

tried to convey to his companions as he described himself as the bread that comes from heaven.

According to Jesus, the bread from heaven was God's offer of life more abundant than they could imagine. The people who murmured, denigrating him as nothing more than the son of their neighbors, were prisoners of their own measly expectations. They wouldn't fathom the idea that God could work through one of them — much less that their small lives could ever be worth stretching into eternity.

Their refusal to accept Jesus as coming from God betrayed their lack of faith in the value and potential of their own lives and consequently their lack of faith in the God who formed them as a people in the divine image.



(Mark Bartholomew)

Jesus told his people that no one could come to him unless drawn by the Father. He wanted them to realize that the only way to understand him was to allow

themselves to be in touch with their deepest human longings, the dimension of themselves which yearns for and leads to God.

St. Augustine prayed in gratitude for this capacity to be open to God with the words, "You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you."

Jesus' call to those who would hear him was the most open invitation he could make. In effect, he was saying, "Allow yourselves to be in touch with God's Spirit within you, and you will realize that I am offering you living bread, my very life that brings eternal life to the world."

The Scriptures we hear this week try to awaken us to what God is offering us. Elijah is here to lead us in the kind of sincere prayer that makes us vulnerable to God's unlimited offers. The memory of the people who murmured against Jesus in the synagogue warns us against mortally diminished hopes and venial expectations.

Together, these Scriptures urge us to allow our hearts' longing for God to lead us to receive the life God desires to share with us.

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[Mary M. McGlone is a Sister of St. Joseph of Carondelet who is currently writing the history of the Sisters of St. Joseph in the U.S.]

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A version of this story appeared in the **July 27-Aug 9, 2018** print issue under the headline: Taste and see.