

19th Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)  
(1 Kings 19:4-8 / John 6:41-51)  
09.08.2015

Dear brothers and sisters,

This morning I invite you to journey with the prophet Elijah whom we have met in the first reading of this Eucharist. You remember: Elijah was filled with **fear**; He lay down and went **to sleep**; when he awoke he discovered at his head **a scone** and a jug of water. Fear, sleep and a scone: three words to guide our meditation today.

Elijah, prophet of the Lord, **was afraid**. He was afraid of Jezebel who wanted to kill him because he had slaughtered the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal who was Jezebel's god. The slaughter of such a number is surprising behaviour for a prophet of the Lord, we might think! But we have to situate this massacre in its historical and cultural context. There was a war raging between the Lord and Baal, between the Lord's prophet, Elijah, and Jezebel's prophets: the prophets of Baal. The prophet Elijah was victorious over the prophets of Baal. Those who served Baal suffered the fate of the conquered in the warfare of the times. This does not mean that Elijah was violent or even barbarian, but this was the way to behave at that time in that kind of situation! So Elijah, now fleeing Jezebel's anger, went into the wilderness and wished he were dead. "Lord, he said, I have had enough! Take my life!"

Like Elijah, it happens that we too can be filled with fear! Sometimes, we have had enough! Reasons to be filled with fear are countless: sickness, unemployment, infidelity of a loved one, violence, loneliness, the weight of guilt and shame caused by a past event, feelings of discouragement, depression and desolation! Like Elijah, it happens that we are afraid. It can be all too much for us. Only a meaningless and painful death seems to wait for us. We are afraid and wish to die.

It is worthwhile to ask ourselves: From whence come our fears? Fear comes when our faith in God weakens, when we forget the presence and the action of God in our lives and count on our own strength alone, when we do our own thing without referring to God. Fear comes when we are so immersed in the present moment that we miss the full picture given by faith.

When we are afraid, like Elijah, we are tempted to lie down and go **to sleep**. We want to escape, to forget, and even to die. Like the ostrich, we bury our head in the sand. Some of us escape by literally going to sleep; some escape by having recourse to an addiction of one kind or another, work included. We sleep just to avoid thinking of our condition. We are afraid to look at ourselves as we are, in the situation in which we find ourselves. But the purpose of the Christian life is not to sleep or to escape, but rather to be more and more awake, vigilant, attentive to the presence of the Lord by our side, the presence of the Lord who cares for us and is always ready to open up a future before us. Let us think of one of the major themes of the Advent Season: "Stay awake". This is the meaning of the angel touching Elijah and saying to him: "Get up and eat". Today, the Lord says to each one of us: Do not be afraid! Do not be discouraged! Get up, awaken yourself. With my help, with my presence beside you, free yourself of all your addictions: be awake, be free, be alive, walk! With me by your side, there is hope!

When Elijah awoke, he discovered that, at his head, the Lord had placed **a scone** and **a jar of water**, to give him the strength to walk and reach Horeb, the mountain of God. Elijah ate and drank, and reached the mountain of God.

What are the scone and the drink proposed to us by the Lord for the journey?

The answer to that question is found in today's gospel passage which is a part of St John's discourse on the Bread of Life. When, in these verses that we have just heard, Jesus speaks of "The bread that I shall give", He makes a clear allusion to what happened on the eve of his passion. When he was gathered with his disciples in the upper room to celebrate the Passover, he took some bread and gave it to his disciples saying: "this is my body given up for you". In so doing, he was anticipating what was to happen the following day when he would offer his life on the cross, out of love for his heavenly Father and for each one of us. It follows that St John's discourse on the bread of life is really a foretaste, a prophecy of the Eucharist

The scone and the drink prepared for us by the Lord for the journey are the bread and wine of the Eucharist, the body and the blood of the Lord Jesus.

Speaking of the Eucharist, St Augustine tells us that we have to "become what we receive".

When we receive the Bread of life in communion, we are reminded that, like Christ, we have to give our lives for the Lord and for our brothers and sisters in need. At certain hours, this can be painful and a very heavy burden; but this is the way to life, eternal life; this is the way to true and lasting happiness.

The blood of Christ received in communion reminds us of the blood of the new covenant of love between God and his people, between God and each one of us. The blood of Christ received in communion reminds us also that Jesus shed his blood for the forgiveness of our sins and our reconciliation with the Father.

If we believe that God has made a covenant of love with his people of which we are part, and consequently that He loves each one of us in a unique way, if we believe that our sins are forgiven, if we believe that the Lord gives himself to us as food and drink in the Eucharist, what is there to fear? To remain in that covenant of love takes away all fear. We have no need to flee in one way or another.

May our participation in this Eucharist rekindle our desire to follow Christ each and every day of our lives, without being discouraged or afraid by the difficulties we encounter, without trying to escape in one way or another! The Lord is with us, giving himself to us and inviting us to give ourselves to Him and to one another.