

19th Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)
(1Kings 19:4-8 / John 6:41-51)
12.08.2018

“Get up and eat for the journey will be too long for you”.

Get up. These two small words could sum up God’s plan for us in Jesus Christ. God in Christ came down to us so that we might rise to be with him. He stooped down so that we might get up. Christ humbled himself so that we might be exalted.

In fact “Get up!” could be the motto of our Christian communities. Our Churches should be the places where men, women and children learn to get up and walk: get up and walk away from the abyss of despair, from the shame of past mistakes, from the guilt of sin, from the humiliation of being bullied or despised.

Sometimes, in our relationship with God, we may feel the need to express our respect and devotion by kneeling, bowing or prostrating ourselves on the ground. Yet we have to be clear that before or after his Resurrection, Jesus never asked anybody to act in such a way. While we have first to humble ourselves before our God, ultimately the most fitting posture for us Christians is to get up and stand in the Lord’s presence because, by God’s grace, we are restored to our status as children of God, brothers and sisters of Christ.

We were not made to crawl on the ground but, as Jesus encourages us, to stand up and raise our heads high (cf. Lk 21:28). Christian discourses which would emphasize repentance, humility, confession of sins, mortifications and abstinence from sex or food without mentioning the fact that all these virtues and practices aim at allowing and helping us to rise, get up, stand and walk freely would not be faithful to the Good News of Christ.

In the episode of the 10 lepers healed by Jesus, we are told that one, a Samaritan, came back, while “he prostrated himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him. Jesus said to him, ‘Get up and go on your way’” (Lk 17:16.19).

We get up not in order to remain stuck in the mud, our two feet set in concrete. Elijah and the healed Samaritan are invited to get up because there is a journey which lies ahead of them.

We are neither settlers nor aimless wanderers but pilgrims. One of the dangers for our Christian lives and for the lives of our Churches is when we think of Christianity as a car park rather than a road, when we consider at some stage, that we have reached the goal and that there is nothing more to do than to settle down cosily and wait for the end.

Martin Luther has some very insightful words for us: “This life is not piety but the process of becoming pious, not health but getting well, not being but becoming. We are not now what we shall be, but we are on the way.” (*Defense and Explanation of All the Articles*, AE 32:24)

We are on the way because, as we read in the Acts of the Apostles, we are the people of the Way (cf. Ac 24:14).

The fact that we are engaged on a journey should prevent us from losing hope when we fail or make a mistake, when we are feeling very low or in the middle of a storm. With Christ, there is always a way forward. We can rely on the promise made by the Lord: “I know the plans I have for you, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.” (Jr 29:11)

Sometimes we stop the clocks and make ourselves and others prisoners of the present, stuck in a particular event or experience, but when we turn to the Lord, we discover that there is always a future for us. A future which may not be as we would like it to be, just as we had

planned it to be, yet if we embrace it with God, then it can become a grace-filled time for us and for those around us.

“Get up and eat for the journey will be too long for you”.

The question which remains is: what do we eat in order to sustain ourselves as we walk the sometimes arduous path of Christian life?

Obviously for Elijah, the question was about water and a scone, here in Northern Ireland we would have had not just water but a cup of tea, strawberry jam and cream with the scone.

Today for us the question would be about how we feed our faith, hope and love. There are many Christians who are underfed when it comes to their faith. And this leaves them very vulnerable and fragile as they seek to deal with the present, the many urgent questions and challenges they face in their daily lives.

The point is not to have degrees in theology. They do not of themselves guarantee understanding or wisdom. Recently a prominent Catholic woman in this country, with many university degrees, made an immature statement about the baptism of small children.

The point is to grow in the love of God and of our brothers and sisters. Moved by love, the journey is about discovering more and more “what is the breadth and length and height and depth” of God’s love for us (cf. Eph 3:18).

A couple of months ago, a group of lay people from this diocese came to the monastery. As we were speaking about the formation of lay people, a woman in her fifties humbly acknowledged that the first step for her would be to understand what is going on during Mass. Forty years after her first communion she realised that she was unable to explain in an adult way what was happening during the liturgy. She described herself as underfed and expressed her longing for more.

To feed our minds, hearts and prayer life in an ongoing manner is necessary in order to prevent us from falling into superstition, from clinging to immature concepts or ideas, from answering important questions about money, sexuality and sacraments in an easy and erroneous way.

Allow me to conclude with words from Pope Francis: “Walking is an art. (...) Walking is precisely the art of looking to the horizon, thinking about where I want to go, and also coping with the weariness that comes from walking.

Do not be afraid of failure, do not be afraid of falling. In the art of walking it is not falling that matters, but not ‘staying fallen’. Get up quickly, immediately, and continue to go on.” (07.06.2013)

Like Elijah and so many of our ancestors in the faith, let us get up quickly, eat properly and journey trustfully.