

REFLECTION FOR 19th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME YEAR B

1 Kings 19:4-8 Ephesians 4:30-5:2 John 6:41-51

It has been a tradition in our family to have supper together.

My grandfather made the best soup.

On every special occasion such as Christmas, Easter, birthdays, wedding anniversaries, my granddad was in the kitchen, wearing an apron my sister bought for him that said, "Kiss the best cook." He'd be drinking some whiskey, stirring his soup. At such occasions, he made the most delicious, best soup.

My granddad's soups had a secret ingredient. At some point in the cooking process, my granddad would say, "Leave the kitchen, so that I can add the secret ingredient!" and my grandmother would say, "What is the secret ingredient?" And he'd answer, "I'm not going to tell you!"

My granddad died. Soon after his death, I realized that all his soup recipes had gone with him. At family gatherings, we slowly stopped having his type of soup – because it reminded us that he was gone.

A few years later, I went to Ghana for holidays. My first evening at home, my grandma was in the kitchen, getting everything ready for our evening meal. I sat down at the dining table, and we started to catch up on all the family gossip. At one point, my grandma said, "Do you want a bowl of soup?" I said 'Sure!'

Grandma put a bowl of soup in front of me, and we continued to talk about my missionary experience in UK. I took a spoonful of soup – and I stopped. I tasted it again. I looked up at my grandma, and said, "This is granddad's soup!" And she said, "Yes, it is." I said, "He told you the secret ingredient?" And she said, "Yes, he did." I asked, "What's the secret?" And she said, "I'm not going to tell you!"

Then, I started to cry. And my grandma cried. And the whole family cried. That soup - the taste of the soup - as soon as it touched my tongue, it was like my grandfather was right there at the table with us! The food had powerfully brought my grandfather into that dining room. But it also reminded us that he was not there the way that we wanted him to be.

I think many of you have a food like that. A food which, if you tasted it right now, would have the power to bring a loved one right to your table. Maybe it's a food that your mother, or dad, or grandparent made.

Is there a food which if you tasted it right now, it would in effect make a loved one present for you? Is there a food that carries someone's memory for you and reminds you of their presence and their absence all at once?

When we eat a certain food, especially when we share that food with people we love – food and drink have the ability to carry people’s presence and memory.

Jesus knew that he had to return to his Heavenly Father. But Jesus also wanted to find a way to remain present to the people He loved so much on earth. And Jesus understood the power of food and drink to carry the presence of the people we love.

So, at the Last Supper Jesus tells the disciples– eat my food, drink my drink. And when you do, I will be there with you. I’ll be there for you. I will be there to help you. This is the great gift of the Eucharist.

Jesus is the Bread of life. Throughout Chapter 6 of John’s Gospel, we hear this important affirmation: Jesus says, ‘I am the Bread of Life’. Jesus says, ‘I am the Bread that came down from Heaven’. Jesus also said, ‘I am the Living Bread’.

As we heard in today’s Gospel reading, this was a hard concept for some of His disciples to understand. But Jesus keeps emphasizing: “Whoever eats this Bread will live forever”.

Jesus gives Himself to us in the Eucharist. This gift cost Jesus everything, His life. Remember that every time you step forward to receive Holy Communion, you are receiving a gift that comes at a high price.

If we had to rely on merit before we could receive Holy Communion, then no one would ever qualify to receive it. Holy Communion is not a reward for good people. It’s a remedy for those who know how unworthy they are and want to get better. It is by joining with the faith community, hearing the invitation of God’s Word, and sharing in the gift of the Eucharist, that we are kept going.

Even though Christ gives Himself to us through the Eucharist to be present in our lives, there are days when it seems that Jesus is somehow absent.

All of us have had days like Prophet Elijah in our 1st Reading. Elijah has been so faithful to God but now it seems his whole life is falling apart. He had feelings of hopelessness and pessimism. Elijah felt worthless and helpless. Elijah said ‘Lord I have had enough. Take my life’

Eventually God provided Elijah food and drink, the nourishment he needed for his journey.

Have you ever prayed that prayer – ‘I have had enough’? We pray for something we desperately need, and the Heavens are silent, no answer. We feel as if the odds are stacked against us and we wonder whether God has given up on us.

We can be tempted to despair like Prophet Elijah. Yet, if we believe, if we seek God in our distress, God will deliver us from our fears as we sing in today’s Psalm.

Psalm 34:19 says the righteous persons may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers them from them all.

Chapter 6 of John’s Gospel about the Bread of Life does not answer every question or take away every tear. But I do know this: Jesus is the Bread for the journey. The Bread of Life is the essential nourishment we need as we make our way home to God.

In the breaking of the Bread and in sharing the Bread of Life, we learn that we can bring everything to God when we gather for worship. We have the chance to thank God in every way we have

experienced God's presence in our lives, and then we can offer to God all those situations where Christ feels absent.

He will give us the Bread of life, the strength and grace we need.

I think that is why Jesus taught us to pray " Give us this day our daily bread". Note, we do not say give us all the bread we could possibly want. We pray for daily bread.

Give us today, what we need for today. Give us the strength, the grace and wisdom to do what you ask us to do today. And we trust O Christ, that you will be here again tomorrow to give us daily bread until at last we see you face to face.

Fr. Patrick