

Ordinary Time 19B 2015
Living Bread

For the past few weeks we have been listening to Jesus' sermon on the Bread of Life—a sermon he gives after he feeds 5000 people in the wilderness. The sermon begins when the people remind Jesus that Moses gave their ancestors bread from heaven. In response Jesus says *he* is the true bread from heaven that has come down from heaven to give life to the world. He is the one whom God sent into the world for the life of the world.

But the people cannot understand how Jesus—whom they have known from his youth—can be the bread from heaven. How can Jesus, the son of Mary and Joseph, make such a claim? How dare he say he is the true bread that has come down from heaven for the life of the world? Jesus responds that although their ancestors ate the bread that Moses gave them in the wilderness they died nonetheless. But those who eat the bread that he will give them will live forever because the bread he will give is his flesh for the life of the world.

Nothing is more important than the food we eat. What we eat becomes part of us. And so these days we pay attention to what we eat. But no matter how careful we are, although the food we consume may keep us alive it will not give us life. It satisfies us for the moment, but it does not satisfy our deepest hunger. We eat, and in a few hours we are hungry again.

But in today's gospel Jesus promises living bread that comes down from heaven—living bread that satisfies our deepest need. He says that if we eat this living bread, we will live forever even if we die. We will live forever because Jesus will raise us up on the last day. The living bread that Jesus gives is the seed and promise of eternal life. And if we eat this bread, he will raise us up on the last day.

In today's first reading, the prophet Elijah finds himself at the point of death because he has no food. His enemies have driven him into the desert, and there he is about to die. But God provides Elijah with bread from heaven, and on the strength of that food, Elijah completes his journey, walking forty days and forty nights to the mountain of God.

Our life is a journey, a journey into the mystery and life of God. But to complete this journey we, like Elijah, must be strengthened by living bread, the bread that comes down from heaven, the body and blood of Christ. Every week, we consume this living bread when we receive the Eucharist. And every time we receive it, we become what we receive: we live in Christ, and Christ lives in us. The Eucharist is living bread because it gives us life. It is our promise of eternal life. It is the food that sustains us on our life's journey. As you approach the Eucharist today, reflect upon what you are doing, and what you are receiving—the living bread that has come down from heaven—and give thanks to the one who gives you eternal life.