

Food for the Journey

1 Kings 19:4-8
Psalm 34
Ephesians 4:30—5:2
John 6:41-51

Every strenuous journey requires good nutrition! On the way back from the ordination a few weeks ago, several of us stopped at the Market Place restaurant for lunch. While visiting with the waiter, he shared with us that he is an avid cyclist and has ridden the “Hotter than Hell 100” in Texas on numerous occasions. As you can imagine, riding a bicycle 100 miles in the scorching heat requires good nutrition and hydration! The waiter then told us about a liquor store at the 98th mile marker of the 100-mile ride in Texas that will give any participant a free drink if they make it 98 miles. He explained that he has never accepted the offer for fear that even a *little* alcohol would keep him from making it the last two miles.

Two things that make this man a good cyclist is that he recognizes the need for proper nourishment during a ride and he has a great desire to get to the finish line. These two things are important for each of us as we make our journey through this life toward the finish line of heaven. In our readings today, we heard about people who had lost sight of the finish line and no longer recognized good spiritual nutrition.

In the first reading today, Elijah lost sight of the proverbial finish line. While God knew where He was leading the prophet, Elijah simply thought he was trying to escape the wrath of Jezebel after he slaughtered all of her false prophets. With no end in sight, Elijah lost his will to live. He lay down under a broom tree and prayed, “This is enough, O Lord! Take my life...” (1 Kings 19:4b).

Knowing the end and purpose of Elijah’s journey, God sent an angel to him to provide him with food and water. The angel told him, “Get up and eat, else the journey will be too long for you!” (1 Kings 19:7b). Again the angel encouraged Elijah to get the nutrition he would need for the journey he was making. We heard that Elijah “got up, ate, and drank; then strengthened by that food, he walked forty days and forty nights to the mountain of God, Horeb” (1 Kings 19:8). God gave Elijah the nutrition he needed to reach his destination.

In the Gospel reading today, we heard about people who no longer recognized good spiritual nutrition. Continuing His Eucharistic discourse from the sixth chapter of John, Christ explains how His Body is now our food for the journey. Most of those who were listening to Him, however, did not understand what He was telling them. The early Jewish Christians, however, did understand. They celebrated the Eucharist as a memorial of Christ saying, “I am the Bread of Life” (John 6:48). They made the connection between what Jesus said about His Body and Blood and the Passover celebration. Just as unleavened bread was used at the Passover because it meant the Jews were a pilgrim people who didn’t have time for bread to rise, the unleavened Eucharist reminds us that we, too, are a pilgrim people journeying to our homeland, heaven.

Pope John Paul II, in his encyclical, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, expresses the intimate link between the Eucharist and our journey to heaven, writing, “Ever since Pentecost, when the Church, the People of the New Covenant, began her pilgrim journey towards her heavenly homeland, the Divine Sacrament has continued to mark the passing of her days, filling them with

confident hope.”¹ He further elaborates, writing, “The Eucharist, as Christ's saving presence in the community of the faithful and its spiritual food, is the most precious possession which the Church can have in her journey through history.”² At the end of the encyclical, the Pope explains, “In the humble signs of bread and wine, changed into his body and blood, Christ walks beside us as our strength and our food for the journey, and he enables us to become, for everyone, witnesses of hope.”³

Every strenuous journey requires good nutrition, and God provides Bread of the finest wheat for us through the Eucharist. I encourage us this week to be mindful of two things—our longing for the “finish line” of eternal life and our hunger and thirst for the spiritual nourishment that will get us there—the Body and Blood of Christ!

SUGGESTED PRAYER EXERCISES:

- ✚ Read John 6:53-56. Recall one specific time in your life when the Eucharist took on a particularly special and important meaning to you. Visit with God about what was happening in your life before, during, and after that experience.
- ✚ In the encyclical, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, we read:

The Church draws her life from the Eucharist. This truth does not simply express a daily experience of faith, but recapitulates *the heart of the mystery of the Church*. In a variety of ways she joyfully experiences the constant fulfillment of the promise: “Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age” (*Mt 28:20*), but in the Holy Eucharist, through the changing of bread and wine into the body and blood of the Lord, she rejoices in this presence with unique intensity. Ever since Pentecost, when the Church, the People of the New Covenant, began her pilgrim journey towards her heavenly homeland, the Divine Sacrament has continued to mark the passing of her days, filling them with confident hope. (¶1)

What word or phrase in this quote speaks to your heart the most? Talk to Christ about *why* that word or phrase touches your heart.

¹ Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, April 17, 2003, ¶1.

² Ibid., ¶9

³ Ibid., ¶62