

The Nineteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time August 8, 2021

During the first months of the Covid-19 pandemic, many people died alone in hospitals and nursing homes because their families could not be there to visit. Henry was just such a person. Though he never contracted the disease, he was in the early stages of organ failure and would soon slip into a coma. Before that, his nurses arranged a video call with his family. During the call, his children and grandchildren were upset and angry that he would die alone. But, they were surprised to see how calm and peaceful Henry himself was.

While they were telling him how much they loved him and how much they wished they could be there with him, Henry said: "Don't worry, I'm going to be alright."

One of his sons asked him what he meant, and he went on to explain: "I asked for the priest to come bring me communion but the nurses told me that even priests were not allowed to come to the hospital because there wasn't enough protective gear for them. But a nurse who is a Eucharistic minister came by yesterday with communion for me. Once I received Jesus, I knew He would be with me and that I would be alright."

Hearing that, his children and grandchildren stopped crying and a feeling of peace came over all of them. It was still painful not to be with him when he breathed his last, but they were consoled knowing that he was comfortable and at peace.

Throughout the centuries, it has been a common practice to give a last communion to those who are dying. It is called "viaticum" which means "food for the journey". Dying persons receive Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament to strengthen them to face their final moments and to guide their souls to their judgment and, hopefully, into their eternal reward.

In today's first reading, we see an example of how bread from heaven gives consolation to us here on earth.

The prophet Elijah is fleeing for his life. The queen of Israel, Jezebel, has sent soldiers out to kill him. After a day of running, he is exhausted and at the point of despair. He asks God to take his life and spare him such misery. Instead, God sends an angel with water and a hearth cake and, on the strength of that food he is empowered to travel forty days and forty nights.

When we hear the number forty in Scripture, it is symbolic of a time of testing and trial. Elijah, whose life is in danger, was facing an extremely challenging trial. All of us here today are also facing some type of testing or trial. We might be struggling with an addiction which seems to always be getting the better of us. We might be tested by

The Nineteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time August 8, 2021

the physical limitations that come with age or sickness. Someone in our family might be struggling and it's causing us much suffering. Whatever it is that we might be faced with, God comes to meet us in our weakness and difficulty. Just as he gave nourishment and consolation to Elijah in the desert, so He comes today to give us nourishment and consolation in the Eucharist. That is what Henry and his family experienced when he was near death. That is what all of us can experience whenever we come to Mass.

If a hearth cake and jug of water can strengthen Elijah for a journey of forty days and forty nights, how much more can Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament empower us to overcome the obstacles in our lives?

In today's gospel, Jesus says, "I am the bread that comes down from heaven." In the Eucharist, we are not receiving someTHING but someONE. It is Jesus Himself who is present to us in the Blessed Sacrament and who enters into us when we receive Holy Communion. It is a great mystery of our faith. The only way to perceive it, is through faith.

Jesus tells us, "Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life." When we receive communion, the minister holds up the host and says, "The Body of Christ", to which we respond, "Amen", which means, "It is true", or "I believe". It could be that some of us here today are struggling to believe in the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. It might just not seem possible that the God who created the world can be fully present in a small wafer of bread. But it is true. Jesus told us so, and He is Truth.

If we are struggling to believe, we can always turn to God and ask Him to enlighten our minds. Struggles with faith can be as painful as any other struggles we experience. God has compassion for us when we are striving to believe but are finding it difficult. The fact that we want to believe indicates that we love God and want to please Him. God will always answer the prayer of someone who desires to believe. He will sustain us as we work through the issues that are confusing us and lead us to people who can help us. Don't give up. Keep coming to Mass and going to confession, and you will eventually come to a point where you not only believe but find that you can't live without receiving Jesus in Holy Communion.

Jesus promises, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world." The eternal life that Jesus gives is not only a reality that awaits us after our physical death, but one that we experience now. The eternal life of Heaven is full

The Nineteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time August 8, 2021

communion with God and the Eucharist is Holy Communion with The Risen Jesus on Earth. It is that loving union with Jesus Himself that strengthens us to face the trials and temptations of this life. It is also that loving union that empowers us to serve others out of love. That is the reality that we celebrate every time we gather around the altar of Jesus' love.