

**19<sup>th</sup> Sunday OT 2021**

**1 Kings 19:4-8 + John 6:41-51**

### **Elijah Fed by Angels**

#### **Jesus, the Bread of Life**

The reflection in *Give Us This Day* is written by **Paula Huston**, Camaldolese Benedictine Oblate, whose monastery, I visited, is high up the mountain side in the Big Sur area of California. At 45 years old she set off on a pilgrimage around the world and writes of her reflection of Elijah's experience in today's reading from the Book of Kings as she passed through Israel. A friend offered to drive her on the same route that Elijah took after fleeing Jezebel. At the top of the crest, she got to stare at the vast desert known as the Negev, looking south from the land of Israel. It is interesting that her Camaldolese Monastery is also perched on top of a crest but with only the Pacific Ocean as a view in the distance stretching out for miles.

Writing about Elijah, I am sure **she compares her own journey** with his as she writes, "What happened to him on the way? Exhaustion, loneliness, the ever-present temptation to give up. Parched with thirst, half starved, he sat down under a broom tree and prayed for death." She continues, "This broom-tree moment had not yet happened to me, though it was coming." We are all on a journey, even our faith community, like the faith community in John's gospel for today's reading.

For the first time in John's account of the sequel to the Feeding of the 5000, the crowd turns hostile. They murmured against him, as the Israelites had murmured against Moses in the desert. At least the crowd no longer looked for the food that perished but sought the bread that Jesus offered them for eternal life, but they refused to accept Jesus as himself this bread...**because they knew his parents!**

Sometimes we are like the crowd, looking for food that perishes even though we know that there is food that does not perish, Jesus Christ, but **which demands a big life-change** that many are not willing to make. Paula Huston, as a Camaldolese Oblate, would eventually start out on that long journey which ironically her world pilgrimage represented and led her to.

Not only individuals are offered to make this journey with Christ, but communities. If it is difficult for an individual to make, **imagine how much more difficult for a community**, which this gospel represents, and many communities never begin.

They are happy with the status quo, not realizing that there is still a horizon that beckons them to continue their journey. At least the Jews had an excuse for not continuing, "We know his parents!" Towards the end of this discourse we read, "...and many of the disciple returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him." We sometimes call those Christian, Sunday Catholics, since that is their only contact with the Lord the rest of the week. They leave Jesus at the church doors and get on with their real lives.

Saint Augustine begins his famous autobiography with words that are now part of everyone's spiritual vocabulary: "***You have made us for yourself, Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.***" These words are shorthand for Saint Augustine's entire autobiography, but they are also the story of every person's journey, spiritual or otherwise. When are we going to start our journey, because that is where the Lord is waiting for us, on the journey? Remember the Easter scene where Jesus met the two disciples fleeing Jerusalem and heading towards Emmaus? It is not always the destination that is important but that we are willing to walk the walk, by getting off our seats and commit ourselves to the journey.

Bluntly, Jesus told the people to cease their murmuring. When they had demanded of him a sign to authenticate his claim, they had quoted to him from Exodus. Jesus referred to them to the prophet Isaiah's saying, "They will all be taught of God." They could only come to him if the Father drew them to him, and Jesus himself was the sole means for the Father to achieve this. The word Jesus speaks is food for eternal life just as earthly bread is food for temporal life. When we think of Jesus as the Bread of Life, we are to think of his Word as well as his Flesh in the Eucharist as food for the journey.

Our Sunday Celebration should be a culmination of a week of walking with Jesus through prayer and meditation, through reflection and contemplation. There is an interesting request by Jesus to the apostles when they asked him to dismiss the crowd so they could find food to eat, and he told them, "***Give them some food yourselves.***" Isn't that what we are doing each Sunday when we gather and read the scriptures, when the Word is broken open, when we distribute the Bread, when we are refreshed by our music ministers and choir, when we enter into this sacred space that was cleaned the day before by our volunteers? Now we are ready for our journeys with even food to share.