

Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B

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

As we spend another Sunday in the "Bread of Life Discourse," we may wonder why. Jesus is the Bread of Life; we must take him in if we want to live forever. We got it; next story, please. But, wait! The nuance we must look at today is our need to learn from God the Father. Jesus quotes [Is 54:13](#): "They shall all be taught by God." This learning leads us to Jesus and thus to eternal life.

What lessons has God been teaching you lately? How are they stretching you? With a wry sense of humor, God has decided I should learn to be a spiritual director. Spiritual direction is the practice of two people meeting regularly to identify how God is active in the directee's life. The director asks questions and listens deeply. I thought I was a great listener, but I have discovered I am not. I am always trying to turn the conversation into an exploration of my issues or God's presence for me. Ego, ego, ego. My mentors affirm what I do notice and then gently point out how much more there was to hear. I have been incredibly humbled, but also annoyed. I hate being stretched. Sometimes I feel I will snap in two. Yet God persists in calling me to learn. Perhaps you are already good at listening well. Your lessons will be different based on the particular situation in which you live and the particular gifts and calling God has for you. Our common thread, however, is that God is constantly teaching us.

What does this have to do with Jesus being the Bread of Life? Learning and eating bread seem like such different activities. Notice the cryptic phrases on either side of the Isaiah quote: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw them" and "Everyone who listens to my Father and learns from him comes to me." In both of these phrases, God starts the ball rolling. God is the starting point and the focal point. When I consider all the lessons God is teaching me, including giving up control, standing up for what is right and worrying more about mercy than righteousness, they are all nudging me into self-sacrificing love, the love with which Jesus, as God and as a human, died and rose for others. Inevitably, we all end up learning the lesson of Jesus. This is the way in which he is the Bread of Life. We see that God is self-sacrificing love, true Love itself, for us. We see that we are called to love the same way, because that is what people who are fully human, as Jesus was, do.

Jesus calls himself the Bread of Life but also the Living Bread. "Life" is a thing we can separate from ourselves and observe from a distance, but "living" is active, ongoing, present. Living Bread teaches that God's incarnation is not a past event, but is happening for us now. Time with our family, with its pain and frustrations, its joys and closeness, our work dealings, our political and social lives – all this is a classroom in which God teaches us kindness, compassion, forgiveness and mercy (Eph 4:32).

Our passage from 1Kings presents Elijah in the process of learning from God. Even the holiest people are constantly stretched. This brave prophet repeatedly confronted Queen Jezebel as she gradually outlawed the Jewish faith. At this point, Elijah has pushed her so hard he must flee for his life. It feels like more than he can take. Though most of us are not national figures, we too have known this despair. Just as for Elijah, God prompts us, sometimes more than once, to do what it takes to keep on resisting. At stake is our own growth in selfless love. This growth is here symbolized by Elijah walking "forty days and forty nights to the mountain of God, Horeb." He went through some spiritual "desert" time of being stretched and at the end of it, on Mt Horeb, he can hear God in the still, small whisper. But not today. Today he must get up and eat and move on. Not today for you and I either; we have so much more to learn from God.

- ❖ What are the lessons God has been teaching you lately?
- ❖ What do you need from God to keep on learning?