

# Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year B

## Nineteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time

### ***First reading:***

(1 Kings 19.4-8)

*Elijah's Breakfast*

The wicked Queen Jezebel had slaughtered all the prophets of the Lord except Elijah. Elijah had then mounted a competition with the prophets of Baal, challenging them to bring fire down from heaven to consume the bull they were sacrificing to Baal. Despite Elijah's taunts, they had failed miserably, leaving the field to an easy victory by Elijah, whose God produced a flawless display of pyrotechnics, climaxing in a splendid holocaust. Nevertheless, Elijah still felt threatened, fled and announced that he had had enough of life, whereupon he fell asleep in a sulk.

God's reaction to this petulant behaviour is touching. First, he wakes Elijah up to an excellent breakfast, then he provides a sufficiently substantial lunch to fortify Elijah for a 40-day trek through the Sinai desert. Typical of God's forgiveness and indulgence! His chosen ones complain to him roundly, and he treats them pretty roughly at times. Look at the relationship between Jeremiah or Job and God! Teresa of Avila put it like this: 'If you treat your friends like that, no wonder you have so few of them.' At least it shows that we are expected to treat God with intimacy and frankness, voicing our complaints to our Father.

**Question:** *What have you to complain about to God?*

### ***Second reading:***

(Ephesians 4.30-5.2)

*The Seal of the Spirit*

In the early Church, Confirmation was known as the "sealing in the Spirit", a rather beautiful image, which stems from this passage. In the ancient world, long before general literacy, everyone had a personal seal to mark documents or possessions. We are the soft wax, which by Confirmation are permanently set as belonging personally to the Spirit of God, so we are his.

It is one unfortunate consequence of the gendered nature of the English language that we have to call the Spirit 'he'. The Greek for 'Spirit' is neuter gendered, but we can hardly call a Person of the Trinity 'it'. The Hebrew for both 'Spirit' and 'Wisdom' is feminine. If the Latin for 'Spirit' had not been uncompromisingly masculine, perhaps the tradition of the western Church might have opted for the feminine and addressed the Spirit as 'she'. Could we have a feminine Person of the Trinity? God is certainly described as having some feminine traits, such as a maternal affection, outdoing even a mother's love for her baby. The Spirit is ever alert to our needs, supporting us before we realize our need of support, wise in guidance, unlimited in generosity, tireless in forgiveness. Being sealed by the spirit commits us to the same sort of consideration for others.

### **Question:**

*Is the Church unduly male dominated, or do women now have a fair place?*

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## **Gospel:**

*(John 6.41-51)*

### *Belief as Eternal Life*

We always think of this Bread of Life Discourse as centred on the Eucharist, but the first part of it - just like the Liturgy of the Word in the first part of the Mass - is centred on the bread of life, which is the revelation of God. The ruling quotation for this kind of Jewish sermon is, as we saw last week, from the Psalm, 'Bread from heaven he gave them to eat.'

Then, half-way through, comes a quotation from the prophets, a sort of half-time booster quote. This quotation from Isaiah comes in today's reading, 'They will all be taught by God.' Its context is the personal relationship of each believer to the Lord. The Lord will sow in our hearts individually the knowledge of himself, so that each of us has a personal, secret link, to be cultivated by prayer. If we listen to the Father and learn from him, we come to Jesus, who has seen the Father.

So in this reading the emphasis is on listening, seeing, believing the revelation of the Father. This is no abstract set of truths but a personal knowing, just as we know those we love on earth. Only at the end do we move on to the final topic of eating the Bread of Life.

## **Question:**

*How do we hear the Word of God in the Church today?*

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