

SUNDAY READINGS

READ AT HOME

Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year B

11 August 2024



Collect

Almighty ever-living God,
whom, taught by the Holy Spirit,
we dare to call our Father,
bring, we pray, to perfection in our hearts
the spirit of adoption as your sons and daughters,
that we may merit to enter into the inheritance
which you have promised.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

Readings and Commentaries

The issue of what we feed our minds has become more and more acute. So much that is disseminated via social media is nasty, brutish and short, to borrow Thomas Hobbes' description of life without civic order. Discerning the truth amid a torrent of falsehoods and misinformation is an increasingly difficult task. A further challenge looms, that of distinguishing between the products of human and artificial intelligence. Christian leaders and communities can play a vital role in this crisis by continuing to bring things both new and old out of the Church's treasure-house of wisdom (Mt 13:52). This demands discipline, dedication, time, prayer and heart, qualities that appear to be in short supply in today's turbulent culture. This is not the time to lose confidence in Jesus' promise to his disciples, that "the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all I have said to you" (Jn 14:26).

A reading from the first book of the Kings 19:4–8

Elijah went into the wilderness, a day's journey, and sitting under a furze bush wished he were dead. 'Lord,' he said 'I have had enough. Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.' Then he lay down and went to sleep. But an angel touched him and said, 'Get up and eat.' He looked round, and there at his head was a scone baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again. But the angel of the Lord came back a second time and touched him and said, 'Get up and eat, or the journey will be too long for you.' So he got up and ate and drank, and strengthened by that food he walked for forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God.

First Reading

It's sad but true that many remarkable biblical women are never named. Worse still, the name of the jealous and vengeful queen Jezebel has become a common and pejorative term in English. Her name does not appear in today's reading from 1 Kings, but it's because of her murderous intent that Elijah flees into the wilderness. The lectionary text makes no reference to this back story.

We are introduced to Elijah when he is at his lowest ebb, wishing he were dead. There in the wilderness his hunger and thirst are eased by the angel's gifts. They give him the strength to walk for forty days and nights to Mt Sinai, here named Horeb. In effect he travels in reverse the exodus journey led by Moses.

There are several other ways in which the story suggests parallels between Elijah and Moses. Like Elijah, Moses reaches the end of his tether and feels he can continue no longer (Num 11:14). Both encounter God on the holy mountain. And just as Elijah walked without nourishment for forty days and nights, so Moses spends forty days on the mountain without food or drink (Ex 34:28).

This story has been chosen to tie in with the gospel in which Jesus presents himself as the bread of life. It's a colourful tale that will appeal to readers and listeners alike.

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 33:2–9

R. Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

I will bless the Lord at all times,
his praise always on my lips;
in the Lord my soul shall make its boast.
The humble shall hear and be glad. **R.**

Glorify the Lord with me.
Together let us praise his name.
I sought the Lord and he answered me;
from all my terrors he set me free. **R.**

Look towards him and be radiant;
let your faces not be abashed.
This poor man called; the Lord heard him
and rescued him from all his distress. **R.**

The angel of the Lord is encamped
around those who revere him, to rescue them.
Taste and see that the Lord is good.
He is happy who seeks refuge in him. **R.**

Responsorial Psalm

Like the psalm for the 17th Sunday, Psalm 33/34 is acrostic, that is, its verses follow the order of the Hebrew alphabet. The lines start with the successive letters, perhaps to help people memorise them. It begins as a hymn of thanksgiving before turning into a lesson in wisdom. It will provide the verses of the responsorial psalm for the next two Sundays as well.

Today's responsorial psalm utilises the first four verses of the source psalm, all of which are in the mode of praise and thanksgiving. The first verse is a declaration of intent by the psalmist: "I will bless the Lord at all times." In the following three verses the people are exhorted to add their voices to that of this individual who called out to the Lord in terror and distress and, like Elijah, was delivered.

The response – "Taste and see the goodness of the Lord" – comes from the fourth stanza. As well as reminding us of the manna in the desert and the food and drink that sustained the prophet Elijah, it looks ahead to the gospel. There Jesus presents himself as bread that gives eternal life, in contrast to the manna which the ancient Israelites ate and still died.

Like the original psalmist the reader will begin with an individual confession of praise and then encourage the assembly to get on board. The more gladly and prayerfully the verses are prayed, the more likely the assembly's response will be made in the same spirit.

**A reading from the letter of St Paul
to the Ephesians**

4:30 – 5:2

Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God who has marked you with his seal for you to be set free when the day comes. Never have grudges against others, or lose your temper, or raise your voice to anybody, or call each other names, or allow any sort of spitefulness. Be friends with one another, and kind, forgiving each other as readily as God forgave you in Christ.

Try, then, to imitate God, as children of his that he loves, and follow Christ by loving as he loved you, giving himself up in our place as a fragrant offering and a sacrifice to God.

**A reading from the holy Gospel
according to John**

6:41–51

The Jews were complaining to each other about Jesus, because he had said, 'I am the bread that came down from heaven.' 'Surely this is Jesus son of Joseph!' they said. 'We know his father and mother. How can he now say, "I have come down from heaven"?' Jesus said in reply, 'Stop complaining to each other.

'No one can come to me
unless he is drawn by the Father who sent me,
and I will raise him up at the last day.
It is written in the prophets:
They will all be taught by God,
and to hear the teaching of the Father,
and learn from it,
is to come to me.
Not that anybody has seen the Father,
except the one who comes from God:
he has seen the Father.
I tell you most solemnly,
everybody who believes has eternal life.
I am the bread of life.
Your fathers ate the manna in the desert
and they are dead;
but this is the bread that comes down from heaven,
so that a man may eat it and not die.
I am the living bread
which has come down from heaven.
Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever;
and the bread that I shall give
is my flesh, for the life of the world.'

Second Reading

Having exhorted the Ephesians in last week's reading to "put on the new self," the author goes on to spell out what this means in practice. Some of his advice is much the same as could be found in non-Christian writings of the day, but he puts it in a Trinitarian matrix. They are not to grieve the Holy Spirit, they are to imitate God, and they are to follow Christ.

The Holy Spirit is spoken of, rather unusually, in personal terms. It is the Spirit who has claimed believers and set his seal upon them as a pledge of freedom for "when the day comes." The Spirit of God is not to be grieved by any kind of unloving behaviour. God is presented as a fount of forgiveness and loving parent. As God's children, believers do not simply love God back; they are to love and forgive one another. The love they share is modelled on the self-sacrificing love of Christ who gave himself up in our place "as a fragrant offering and a sacrifice to God."

These are high ideals, but not in a pure abstract sense. What makes it possible for the baptised to live lovingly is the seal of the Holy Spirit, the forgiveness of God and the self-sacrifice of Christ. This text demands much but gives more. Readers should be pleased to convey its encouragement to the assembly.

Gospel

At this point in the discourse, it is no longer the crowd who question Jesus but "the Jews." Time, therefore, for homilists to be aware that in John's gospel the primary reference of this term is the Jewish authorities, not the people at large, lest their preaching unwittingly reinforce unacceptable anti-Semitism. Whether the NRSV lectionary's solution – to replace "Jews" with "people" – is satisfactory is open to debate.

Like their forebears in the desert, the authorities complain. Long ago this resulted in the manna that gave temporary respite from hunger; now it highlights the incomparable gift of bread that gives life for ever. The issue of Jesus' origins recurs. His antagonists are fixated on the mundane facts of Jesus' family; they have no insight into the truth that John spelt out so beautifully in the prologue: "No one has ever seen God; it is the only Son, who is nearest the Father's heart, who has made him known" (1:18).

Most of this passage continues in wisdom style as it equates eating with believing. In the book of Proverbs, Wisdom attracts sincere seekers and invites them to her banquet (9:1–6). We'll hear this text next Sunday. The last verse of today's gospel shifts attention from this past wisdom tradition to the "hour" that is yet to come, when Jesus will be raised up on the tree of the cross and draw all to himself (12:32). Those who believe will participate in Jesus' death-defeating victory by eating the eucharistic bread, as Jesus will go on to explain.

The bulk of the reading has Jesus in the mode of authoritative pronouncement and should be proclaimed accordingly, but also with sufficient deliberation for the assembly to take Jesus' teaching to heart.

An alternative translation of the scripture readings is given here from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). This may be particularly useful for those in parishes which use the NRSV Lectionary.

NINETEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

FIRST READING (NRSV)

A reading from the first book of Kings 19:4-8

Elijah went a day's journey into the wilderness,
and came and sat down under a solitary broom tree.
He asked that he might die:
"It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life,
for I am no better than my ancestors."
Then Elijah lay down under the broom tree and fell asleep.
Suddenly an angel touched him and said to him,
"Get up and eat."
He looked, and there at his head
was a cake baked on hot stones,
and a jar of water.
He ate and drank, and lay down again.
The angel of the Lord came a second time, touched him,
and said, "Get up and eat,"
otherwise the journey will be too much for you."
Elijah got up, and ate and drank;
then he went in the strength of that food
forty days and forty nights to Horeb the mountain of God.

SECOND READING (NRSV)

A reading from the letter of Paul to the Ephesians 4:30 - 5:2

Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God,
with which you were marked with a seal
for the day of redemption.
Put away from you all bitterness and wrath
and anger and wrangling and slander;
together with all malice,
and be kind to one another;
tenderhearted, forgiving one another,
as God in Christ has forgiven you.
Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children,
and live in love,
as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us,
a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

GOSPEL (NRSV)

A reading from the holy gospel according to John 6:41-51

The people began to complain about Jesus because he said,
"I am the bread that came down from heaven."
They were saying,
"Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph,
whose father and mother we know?
How can he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?"
Jesus answered them,
"Do not complain among yourselves.
No one can come to me
unless drawn by the Father who sent me;
and I will raise that person up on the last day.
It is written in the prophets,
'And they shall all be taught by God.'

Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me.
Not that anyone has seen the Father
except the one who is from God;
he has seen the Father.
Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life.
"I am the bread of life.
Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died.
This is the bread that comes down from heaven,
so that one may eat of it and not die.
I am the living bread that came down from heaven.
Whoever eats of this bread will live forever;
and the bread that I will give for the life of the world
is my flesh."

Concluding Prayer

Solemn Blessing (Ordinary Time VI)

May God bless us with every heavenly blessing,
make us always holy and pure in his sight,
pour out in abundance upon us the riches of his glory,
and teach us with the words of truth;
may he instruct us in the Gospel of salvation,
and ever endow us with fraternal charity.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

And may the blessing of almighty God,
the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
come down on us and remain with us for ever.
Amen.

(Adapted from the Solemn Blessing for Ordinary Time VI, Roman Missal p. 717)