

HOMILY for 19th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year B

This Sunday's First Reading tells us one of the sad, but realistic stories in the Bible. It says, "Elijah went a day's journey into the desert until he came to a broom tree & sat beneath it. He prayed for death: 'This is enough, O Lord! Take my life, for I am no better than my fathers.' He lay down & fell asleep under the broom tree, but then an angel touched him & ordered him to get up & eat. He looked & there at his head was a hearth cake & a jug of water... He got up, ate, & drank; then strengthened by that food, he walked forty days & forty nights to the mountain of God, Horeb." Evidently Elijah tried to make it to the mountain of God. The journey is tough; & he would have to face lots of challenges along the way. He walked for only a day under harsh conditions & decided to give up on that journey. But, the Lord sent an angel to bring him food & drink & encourage him to keep going & complete his mission. Nourished & energized, Elijah got up & continued to walk for forty days & nights to finish his journey.

Have you ever felt overwhelmed & wanted to give up on something like Elijah did before? I'm sure most of us here have had moments of hopelessness that we want to throw in the towel & stop the mission that God has assigned to us. Sometimes we might have felt overwhelmed in the face of our daily challenges. But, as you have heard in today's First Reading, God usually sends us an angel to help us & bring us hope when we feel down in the dump. The question for us is whether we would recognize the angel & accept that divine help. Elijah apparently accepted the angel's help & had enough courage & motivation to complete his long journey to Mount Horeb. For the Lord would be there to strengthen him & show him the way. Likewise, we might feel discouraged when facing a challenging situation or get overwhelmed by our life burden. We might want to give up on our current mission & worst yet, end our life altogether. That seems to be the rising trend these days. Quite a few people have expressed their depressing view of life & wish to end it. That is why we have heard & read lots of recent reports about the exponential rising rate in suicide. Besides, that taboo issue is so intertwined with mental health problem, which has been mentioned a lot lately. So, what must we do to avoid hopelessness & reduce the current suicidal rate?

First of all, we got to learn from Elijah & try to call on God to give us hope & encouragement. Once we have done that, we must be willing to welcome all the angels that God might send us & make good use of their assistance. Those angels could be our family members, our friends, or a stranger who has a kind heart & wants to help us. They might come to talk to us or give us a helping hand when we are down in the dump. They might try to cheer us up & help us see the big picture where God might have some kind of plan for us. Our job is to be able to recognize that divine plan & welcome those angels with gladness & thankfulness at those moments.

Secondly, we must be open to the work of the Holy Spirit & learn to be kind to one another & lift up anyone who might feel overwhelmed or hopeless. If a hopeless person can find love & support around him/her, that person would usually find encouragement for her life mission & reasons to live. That is why St. Paul gives us this wise advice in today's Second Reading, "Brothers & sisters, do not grieve the Spirit of God, with which you were sealed for the day of redemption. All bitterness, fury, anger, shouting, & reviling must be removed from you, along with all malice. And be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another as God has forgiven you in Christ." So, St. Paul believes that if we can create an environment full of the

Spirit of God such as kindness, compassion, & forgiveness, we would help bring relief to the hopeless & inspire everyone to fulfill a purpose-driven life. That environment will surely bring hope & joy to all of its members. In a way, we can blame our current hostile & hopeless environment on everyone, including our political & religious leaders because they have slowly drained the Spirit of God out of our current society.

Finally, we can inject more hope to our human society & lift up more souls who might feel overwhelmed by their life burden if we can get everyone to get connected to the living bread come down from Heaven. For that bread is always fresh & full of nourishment. It draws its energy directly from the divine source that will never run out. Anyone of us who takes in the living bread will be fearless & full of hope. As Jesus puts it in today's Gospel, "...I myself am the living bread come down from Heaven. If anyone eats this bread, he/she shall live forever; the bread I will give is my flesh for the life of the world." That is why we Christians have stayed connected to Jesus in the Eucharist & prayers & have been called the people of hope.

My dear brothers & sisters, hope is a rare commodity in our world these days as we see more challenges & hostility. Yet, we cannot survive a day in this world without hope. Politicians have promised hope to the public over the years by making empty promises. That is why our world has been more hopeless & overwhelming for people to deal with. Today, we have found new ways to have a meaningful hopeful life. But, the best way for it is to stay connected to Jesus – the living bread come down from Heaven.