

NINETEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
Year B: 1Kgs 19:4-8; Ps 34; Eph 4:30-5:2; Jn 6:41-51
August 8, 2021
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Have you ever overheard or caught people murmuring about you? Have you ever been aware that people were complaining about you? This is something Our Lord Jesus had to deal with all the time. The Gospel tells us that “[t]he Jews murmured about Jesus because he said, ‘I am the bread that came down from heaven,’ and they said, ‘Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph? Do we not know his father and mother? Then how can he say, “I have come down from heaven”?’” The Jews were murmuring about Jesus, because they knew that He was claiming to be divine.

Most of us would probably get very defensive and resentful, if we heard others murmuring or complaining about us, even if we were at fault somehow, and the complaints were fair. We don’t like the thought of others talking about us, even if what they say is true. And, we might react by lashing out to defend ourselves, or maybe by giving the old “silent treatment.” But what did Jesus do? In response, Jesus said to His critics, “*Stop murmuring among yourselves. ... Amen, amen, I say to you, ... I am the bread of life. ... I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.*” In response to the murmuring about His claim to be divine, Jesus made an even more controversial revelation by explaining the truth about the Eucharist – that His flesh is food from Heaven. But, it wasn’t until later, at the Last Supper, when He instituted the Eucharist, that the Apostles got a clearer explanation of this controversial and mysterious revelation.

So, why did Jesus start talking about the mystery of the Eucharist, when His critics didn’t even accept the truth of His divinity and His credentials? Jesus knew that He was sent from God the Father to make a revelation to the world about God’s plan for our redemption, and also for how we would relate to God after we were redeemed. And this plan includes the gift of the Eucharist that is made possible precisely because Jesus is divine. Jesus also knew that some people would choose to accept Him and some people would choose to reject Him, as happens in every generation since He came, and He couldn’t allow some murmuring and opposition to prevent Him from making His important revelation to the world. He was steadfast, in spite of all the opposition He faced, and He knew He had to start teaching the world about the Eucharist.

In His teaching about the Eucharist, Jesus teaches us how to think about Holy Communion each time we receive it. He tells us to think of it and believe in it as bread from Heaven, as the bread of life that keeps our souls alive here on earth and also promises to bring them to eternal life. So, each time we approach to receive Jesus in the Eucharist, we should be thinking of it as bread from Heaven which gives true life and eternal life to our souls, if we are properly disposed to receive it.

In the second reading, St. Paul also gives us some guidance and direction for how we should be thinking about Holy Communion each time we approach to receive it. We know that the Eucharist is the memorial of the sacrifice of Christ on the Cross. At the Last Supper, when Jesus took bread and said, *“This is my body which will be given up for you”* (Lk 22:19) He was referring to the sacrifice of His body on the cross the following day. So, when we approach to receive Holy Communion, we should be thinking of it as a sacrifice, or what St. Paul calls *“a sacrificial offering to God [as] a fragrant aroma.”*

And he tells us that, when we receive God in Holy Communion, we should make sure we are presenting ourselves to God as a similar sacrifice that is pleasing, and not offensive to God. St. Paul says, *“Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were sealed for the day of redemption. All bitterness, fury, anger, shouting, and 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. ... [B]e imitators of God, ... and live in love, as Christ loved us and handed himself over for us as a sacrificial offering to God for a fragrant aroma.”*

These are great words to remind us of the importance of being properly disposed to receive Jesus in Holy Communion. We want to make sure that we don't grieve the Holy Spirit by approaching the Eucharist with hearts that are filled with bitterness, or anger, or malice, or resentment of any kind. Instead, we want to make sure that we present ourselves as a sacrifice that is sweet and pleasing to the Lord, like a fragrant aroma, made so by our effort to be holy in His sight. Very often, in the prayers at Mass, we ask God to “make of an us an eternal offering” to Him, and this is the sentiment that should be in our hearts each time we approach the altar of God to receive the Bread of Life. Jesus says, *“I am the bread of life. ... I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.”*