

God Sustains Us Always

1Kgs. 19: 4-8; Ps. 34; Eph. 4: 30-5: 2; Jn. 6: 41-51

Like many people, I have been watching the Olympics. This week the spotlight has shone on the track and field athletes. The conditions in Tokyo have been brutal; high temperatures and extreme humidity. Even after a one hundred metre or two hundred metre race, there are runners lying all over the track as if they had just finished a marathon. They look like they are ready to die.

Elijah was on the run from the wrath of Jezebel. She had wanted to turn the Israelites to worshipping Baal. Elijah, being a prophet of God would not allow this. He battled a multitude of prophets of Baal and had them killed. For this, Elijah had to flee from Jezebel's rage. After running a day's journey into the desert, Elijah was so exhausted that he lay in the shade of a broom tree and prayed for death to overtake him.

He had done everything that God wanted him to do and yet he had had to run for his life and was at the point of death. God appeared to have abandoned Elijah and yet, at the hour of his greatest need, God sent His angels to bring food and drink to Elijah. Elijah was restored to health and continued on his pilgrimage to Mount Horeb, to commune with God.

The Gospel for this Sunday is the third instalment from the sixth chapter of John. Over the past two weeks, we have read that Jesus performed a great miracle to feed a crowd of over five thousand people. But He pointed out that, rather than focusing on the physical sign, they should learn that His greatest act was to feed them spiritually; to feed them for eternity. He says that 'He is the bread that came down from heaven' and that 'whoever believes has eternal life'.

We are called to have faith; to believe that Jesus is 'the bread of life'. We must put aside any skepticism and, as St. Paul says: 'Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption'.

After almost eighteen months of the pandemic with all its attendant inconveniences, isolation, sickness and death, we may feel as though we are a days' journey into our personal desert. We are so exhausted and discouraged that we want to find our own broom tree under which to rest. We may feel that God abandoned us when we needed Him the most.

But God is always with us, ready to provide nourishment for us just as He did for Elijah. Elijah had fled for his life and had set off into the desert on a pilgrimage to Mount Horeb to meet God. We do the same but our pilgrimage is not to Mount Horeb but, rather, to church where we can approach the altar and commune with God.

When we receive the Body of Christ from the priest, we are receiving the bread from heaven to sustain us as we journey through our desert. Jesus said: 'Whoever eats of this bread will live forever' and 'whoever believes has eternal life'. When the priest intones the words: 'the Body of Christ' and we respond: 'Amen', we are signifying that we believe that we are eating the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ.

Sometimes, God puts trials and tribulations in front of us not to drive us away from Him but, rather, to draw us closer. Even when he was praying for death, Elijah drew near to God. We need to do the same and, in faith, continue to accept the bread of life that God provides.