



OFFICE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year B

Homily

[*1 Kings 19:4-8; Psalm 34; Ephesians 4:30-5:2; John 6:41-51*]

To take us into the message of today's scriptural texts, I'd like to refer once again to the Olympic competition in Tokyo. Last Sunday, we spoke of the gold medal of eternal life, won for us by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Today I draw our attention to the endurance of the athletes as they compete. It is extraordinary, leaving me wondering how they actually do it, especially in Tokyo's merciless heat. I know that by the time I would make it half way along a lane of the pool or even a quarter way around the track, I'd need the Last Rites. Yet we've seen that even they, the world's top athletes, often collapse from exhaustion at the end of the meet, sometimes even before it finishes.

Endurance and exhaustion are apt images, it seems to me, to describe the daily reality of many people. Life is an endurance test as we experience, for example, the pressures of making ends meet in an unpredictable economy, bringing up children in a time when they are attracted more by social media folly than parental wisdom, looking after aging parents, grappling with loneliness, or the anxiety that grips us when we are out of control. Add to this the punishing heat of the pandemic we have long endured, and the sad legacy of residential schools leaving us breathless with heartache, many people now find themselves on the point of collapse from sheer exhaustion, both physical and emotional. We may well wonder how the athletes do it in Tokyo. A more immediate concern is how we can do it, and this is precisely what is addressed by the biblical texts.

I invite you, first of all, to consider the experience of the prophet Elijah, recounted in the first reading. He is running for his life as he flees from the Queen, who seeks to kill him. At this point in the story, Elijah has collapsed from exhaustion and is ready to give up, even wanting to die. An angel of the Lord appears to him and says this: "Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you." Here we see the tender compassion of God, and His deep concern for his prophet. God Himself provides a cake and jar of water, to nourish Elijah with the strength he will need to endure the journey.

Moved by the same loving concern, God says to us what he said to Elijah: "Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you." In other words, "I know what you are going through, better than you know it yourselves. Let me look after you. You simply cannot endure life's journey on your own. I know what you need and I have provided it. Take and eat, or the journey will simply be too much, far beyond your limited power of endurance."

As athletes race around a track, often we see teams of volunteers holding out bottles of water to refresh them. No doubt, the coaches have told their athletes to take that water so that they can keep going. What God holds out to us is nothing less than the gift of His Son, Jesus. Only by his strength can we

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endure; only by his mercy can we make it across the finish line into eternal life. And God is saying to us, “Take what I’m giving you.”

Where God’s provision is offered is in the sacrament of the Eucharist. This is what we hear Jesus himself promising in the passage today from the Gospel of John. “I am the bread of life,” he says. “Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

We don’t need to go through life exhausted, living always on the verge of collapse from whatever pressures beset us. All that we need for endurance is given to us in Jesus Christ. His strength becomes ours whenever we receive him in the wondrous gift of the Eucharist.

Now, as Christians, our endurance test involves more than just the pressures of daily living. As St. Paul reminds us, we also contend against forces contrary to the Christian way of life: bitterness, wrath, anger, wrangling, slander and malice, which are in constant competition within our hearts against the kindness and forgiveness that must occupy them. Without the Eucharist, this contest simply cannot be endured, there is no hope of victory.

“Get up and eat, otherwise the journey will be too much for you.” We answer this call of the Lord by coming to the Eucharist here at mass. As we “get up and eat”, as we receive today the food that Jesus provides - himself, the Bread of Life - may we know the joy of his saving help and the strength he provides for our journey.

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St. Joseph’s Basilica
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