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Photo by Sr. Karin Nürnberg, CSJ, from the Abbey St. Hildegard in Eibingen, Germany

BREAD FROM HEAVEN

By Sr. Jeanne Fallon, CSJ

Today's First Reading and Excerpts from Today's Gospel

Elijah went a day's journey into the desert, until he came to a broom tree and sat beneath it. He prayed for death saying: "This is enough, O LORD! Take my life, for I am no better than my fathers." He lay down and fell asleep under the broom tree, but then an angel touched him and ordered him to get up and eat. Elijah looked and there at his head was a hearth cake and a jug of water. After he ate and drank, he lay down again, but the angel of the LORD came back a second time, touched him, and ordered, "Get up and eat, else the journey will be too long for you!" He got up, ate, and drank; then strengthened by that food, he walked forty days and forty nights to the mountain of God, Horeb.

1 KINGS 19:4-8

The 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?” Jesus answered and said to them, “Stop murmuring among yourselves. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him, and I will raise him on the last day. It is written in the prophets: They shall all be taught by God. Everyone who listens to my Father and learns from him comes to me. ... I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert, but they died; this is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat it and not die. 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.”

JOHN 6:41-45, 48-51

Reflection

In this brief passage, the prophet Elijah was fleeing from Queen Jezebel who threatened to kill him after he had won the contest between the prophets of Baal and the believers of Yahweh. Although this passage began with a journey to save his life, once Elijah arrived at the safety of the southern desert, he asked God to allow him to die. *“This is enough!”* The prophet was exhausted and discouraged from his futile efforts to help the people follow Yahweh, so he asked God that death might come. Yet, God envisioned a different path for Elijah, so an angel miraculously provided Elijah with food (a fresh-baked hearth cake) and water for the journey, which gave him strength to walk the long distance to the Mountain of God, Horeb, where God desired to have a personal encounter with Elijah.

Today’s Gospel from John 6 begins with the murmuring of the Jews because Jesus called himself *bread from heaven*. They were familiar with his earthly parents in Nazareth but totally unaware of his divine origin. Jesus was describing himself as God’s gift of life and strength, sustenance for the present moment and for all eternity, but their faith was insufficient; they couldn’t receive Jesus’ words. When Jesus quoted the prophet Isaiah (54:13) who said, ***“they shall all be taught by God,”*** Jesus was referring to the way the Jews of old used to be familiar with hearing God’s voice in the scriptures. Jesus was in direct communion with God, his Father; in this passage he was inviting his followers to recognize who he was: the living bread come down from heaven, who desired to give them, and all of us, life forever.



Close-Up Photo of a Whole Piece of Bread

By Skyler Ewing

For Pondering

Ponder with me, for a moment, the quotation, *“they shall all be taught by God.”* For as long as I can remember, these words have intrigued me, and I believe they are true. When I made my 30-day Ignatian Spiritual Exercises Retreat in 1980, I learned that St. Ignatius believed that God, our Creator, deals directly with the creature, that is, with each of us: God communicates God’s self to the faithful person seeking God’s will (Annotation 15). Later, when I began to give spiritual direction, this directive from Ignatius guided me. It brought me comfort to know that spiritual direction was God’s work, and I was only providing a space where God’s work of art could flourish. Ignatius’ directive was encouraging the seeker to have intimate conversation with God and to foster deep friendship with Christ. From Ignatius’ autobiography, it is clear that he was being taught by God “as a school teacher deals with a child while instructing him.”

I mention this passage from Isaiah, which Jesus quoted in today's Gospel, because it has been a gift to me. I invite you to recall a time when God was directing you or teaching you in your inmost self, and you became aware that this was “of God.” Perhaps that moment gave you strength to go on or sustenance to follow your dream or vocation, just as Elijah received the bread and drink from an angel so he could make the journey to God’s holy mountain,

Horeb. Jesus himself is the Living Bread come down from heaven so we will not die. Take time to attend to his precious gift and receive this Bread that he gives us for the life of the world.

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