

Revival 7 Encountering Jesus in Difficult Times

Leader: In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

All: **Amen.**

Leader: Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful

All: **And kindle in them the fire of your love.**

Leader: Send forth your Spirit, and they shall be created

All. **And You shall renew the face of the earth.**

Leader: Let us pray.

All: **O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations. Through Christ Our Lord. Amen.**

A reading from the First Book of Kings

Elijah was afraid and fled for his life, going to Beer-sheba of Judah. He left his servant there ⁴ and went a day's journey into the wilderness, until he came to a solitary broom tree and sat beneath it. He prayed for death: "Enough, LORD! Take my life, for I am no better than my ancestors." ⁵ He lay down and fell asleep under the solitary broom tree, but suddenly a messenger^[b] touched him and said, "Get up and eat!" ⁶ He looked and there at his head was a hearth cake and a jug of water. After he ate and drank, he lay down again, ⁷ but the angel of the LORD came back a second time, touched him, and said, "Get up and eat or the journey will be too much for you!" ⁸ He got up, ate, and drank; then strengthened by that food, he walked forty days and forty nights to the mountain of God, Horeb.

The Word of the Lord

My friends, let's begin with a story that perhaps some of you heard before from Anthony De Mello. It is entitled "Jars of Clay". It begins...A water bearer in India had two large pots, each hung on each end of a pole which he carried across his neck. One of the pots had a crack in it, and while the other pot was perfect and always delivered a full portion of water at the end of the long walk from the stream to the master's house, the cracked pot arrived only half full. For a full two years this went on daily, with the bearer delivering only one and a half pots full of water to his master's house. Of course, the perfect pot was proud of its accomplishments, perfect to the end for which it was made. But the poor cracked pot was ashamed of its own imperfection, and miserable that it was able to accomplish only half of what it had been made to do.

After two years of what it perceived to be a bitter failure, it spoke to the water bearer one day by the stream. "I am ashamed of myself, and I want to apologize to you." "Why?" asked the bearer. "What are you ashamed of?" "I have been able, for these past two years, to deliver only half my load because this crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way back to your master's house. Because of my flaws, you have to do all of this work, and you don't get full value from your efforts," the pot said.

The water bearer felt sorry for the old cracked pot, and in his compassion he said, "As we return to the master's house, I want you to notice the beautiful flowers along the path." Indeed, as they went up the hill, the old cracked pot took notice of the sun warming the beautiful wild flowers on the side of the path, and this cheered it some. But at the end of the trail, it still felt bad because it had leaked out half its load, and so again it apologized to the bearer for its failure.

The bearer said to the pot, "Did you notice that there were flowers only on your side of your path, but not on the other pot's side? That's because I have always known about your flaw, and I took advantage of it. I planted flower seeds on your side of the path, and every day while we walk back from the stream, you've watered them. For two years I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate my master's table. Without you being just the way you are, he would not have this beauty to grace his house."

The moral of the story? Each of us have our own unique flaws. We are all cracked pots. But if we will allow it, the Lord will use our flaws to grace his Father's table. In God's great economy, nothing goes to waste. My friends, I find that story from Anthony de Mello to be helpful, especially in times when I feel like a cracked pot. Elijah certainly felt that way in the reading we are considering this evening. Let's go back to that reading again.

The reading says, Elijah laid down on the ground and prayed for death. As he did so, he fell asleep under the broom tree. God responded to Elijah's prayer by sending an angel to touch him, ordering 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 still overwhelmed with depression, 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.

I love that reading. Elijah felt like a cracked pot. Elijah was suffering from depression to the point of hungering for death. God responded by giving him food and told him to keep moving. Keep moving. There is so much wisdom in the idea that, when we are overwhelmed with depression, that we simply need to trust Jesus by moving and keep moving.

The theme for this evening is "Encountering Jesus in difficult times". I felt that this is the right theme right now because we in fact live in challenging times. There was a moment in the summer we felt that Covid was behind us, and better days were just around the corner. That is when we were hit with Delta. Just when we thought Delta was passing us by, the worst wave of all in many respects hit us with Omicron.

For the record, I still believe that our young people are the ones who suffer most from all of this. In addition to all the stress the pandemic gives us, you have the stress of homework assignments, projects to get finished, along with the profound grief of not being able to enjoy a lot of the fun and social activities that make the experience of going to school so special. It is hard to be social and build relationships with masks over your faces all the time. There are also moments during the winter when the stress can tempt us to not feel good about ourselves at times too. At times, we can feel like we are moving one step forward to only move two steps back. At times, we can even be tempted to feel like failures.

As a people of faith, it is helpful to remember that we are never alone in these moments of disappointment, as we can see in the story about Elijah in the desert. Elijah's journey of forty days mirrors the Hebrews of Exodus who endured forty years in the desert. A desert is a place of dryness. A desert is a place of hunger and thirst. It can also be a place of discouragement. A place where we can feel broken...like a cracked pot. Both the Hebrews of Exodus and Elijah had moments of profound discouragement along the way. God responded by giving them food for the journey.

This piece has profound Eucharistic significance. In fact, during the Last Rites of the Catholic Church, the last reception of Holy Communion in life is called Viaticum. It is a word that literally means "food for the journey", calling to mind the bread that fed the Hebrews in the desert and the bread that fed Elijah on his way to Mount Horeb. You see, when Jesus is revealed to us as the Son of God in the Gospels, we learn that he is the bread that has come down from heaven. During times of disappointment, during times we find ourselves in the spiritual desert, God not only gives us bread from heaven. God gives us his very Son as food for the journey. Jesus is our bread. Just as the body needs food to sustain us, the soul needs food too. Jesus is that food. The Eucharist is where we can find Jesus in times of disappointment.

Going to Mass on Sunday is where we can be spiritually fed so we can make it another week. When Sunday comes around, I can imagine a number of us can feel like Elijah who just wants to go back to sleep on the desert floor. When that moment comes on Sunday morning, we can find ourselves dragging our feet a bit. However, after Mass we know we are so better off for having made it because it is at Mass when Jesus feeds us with his very self in the Eucharist as our food for the journey. The Eucharist gives us strength to make it another week.

My friends, what do you hunger for most in this life? What do you hunger for most? It can be offsetting when we consider Elijah's answer was to die in the desert in despair. It can be bewildering how the Hebrews of Exodus answered that question at the beginning of their journey. God freed them from slavery and all they wanted to do is to run back to Pharaoh. This makes me wonder from time to time, when we ask ourselves the question any given day, "What do we hunger for most in life" how often do come up with really lousy answers?

Jesus can help us here. In the Gospel according to St. John, "Jesus says, '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.'"

And so, in the moments we feel like cracked pots, we can ask ourselves, what am I hungering for most in this life? What am I really hungry for? Is it for food that perishes or for food that endures for eternal life? Because we are human and not robots, we know that at times our answer to that question can be really lousy, sinners that we are. There are times when we simply can't see how our very flaws can be sources of flowers on the side of the road, blessing the world around us.

It is therefore comforting to me that God's remedy for disappointment is indeed the Bread of Life. By giving us his Body and Blood in the Eucharist, Jesus is saying something loud and clear. Jesus is saying, "I love you and I will never abandon you." He is saying, "I am always close to you, as close to you as food and drink." What this means is: no matter what it is we are dealing with right now, the Eucharist encourages us to keep moving as members of His Body, despite our flaws. We must keep moving. How do we begin? A good place to begin is by asking ourselves the question: what do I hunger for most? My friends, when it gets right down to it, in times of disappointment we hunger for Jesus, who is the way, the truth and the life.

Guidance for the rest of the evening

At this time, I get to guide you through the rest of this evening. We will again begin with exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. It is an activity we call "adoration". We believe Jesus is truly present in the Holy Eucharist and this is an opportunity to commune with Him. Soon after we begin adoration, I will then invite our young people enrolled for our Revival small groups to quietly move in the direction of their group leaders. Notice that the color on your name tags correspond to the color of the flags of your group leaders. There is no expectation other than being present; however, you are welcome to participate. The questions for conversation are on the handout. There are no wrong answers. The rest of us will stay and pray for you.

The main reason for these circles however is just an opportunity to offer a prayer at the end for whatever it is you are asking of God right now. You will be invited to light a candle representing that prayer and to bring that candle to place on the steps of the altar, to Jesus. After you put the candle on the steps of the altar, in reverence consider stepping aside and genuflect, making the sign of the cross, and then pray back at your seat for the others. I invite our group leaders to please be back here by 7:45, 7:50 at the latest, so we don't feel rushed. The evening will wrap up shortly thereafter with prayer and benediction. My heartfelt gratitude to all of you for being here tonight. Please stand.