

19<sup>th</sup> Sunday OT Year B  
August 8-9, 2015

*Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God.*

Readings: 1 Kings 19:4-8; Ephesians 4:30-5:2; John 6: 41-51

“This is enough, O LORD! Take my life, for I am no better than my fathers.” When we find ourselves in tough spots, sometimes we say things that we regret, looking back, many years later. I really do not know if Elijah regretted his words spoken beneath the Broom tree, but they were the words of a broken and exhausted man.

In Catholic terminology we call it despair, and from one perspective it is a part of the valley of tears through which we all walk while on earth. In another sense, it can be a serious sin, a form of turning one’s back on God. Every now and then, “giving up” seems like the best option, be it giving up on a job, a school, a relationship, or seemingly as with Elijah, perhaps even on life itself.

The prophet had been trying to win people over from their flirtations with the false god named Baal, leading them back to the worship of the one true God, the Lord. Today’s passage is preceded by the account in which God sent down fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice Elijah had prepared in the famous battle of the “gods,” so to speak. It looked like finally the balance of the scales had tipped in Elijah’s favor and the people would turn to follow the Lord.

Instead, he went from the thrill of “winning” the battle with Baal’s followers, into the depths of despair. You see, when the news got back to Jezebel, the Queen of Israel, and an loyal adherent of Baal worship, she sought to have Elijah killed. Thus, he fled into the inhospitable desert, literally fearing for his life. But there he was comforted and offered a simple meal of a hearth cake and a jug of water—nothing substantial, but enough to sustain him. One can see a foreshadowing of the Eucharist in this passage.

Elijah overcame despair with the help of God's grace, and therein lies our lesson. St. Paul reminded us in our second reading that we should not grieve the Holy Spirit of God by means of our bitterness, anger and reviling. This is key because despair is often preceded by these qualities, these outbursts. Our Catechism teaches that with *despair*, essentially "man ceases to hope for his personal salvation from God, for help in attaining it or for the forgiveness of his sins. Despair is contrary to God's goodness, to his justice - for the Lord is faithful to his promises - and to his mercy."<sup>1</sup>

Regardless of the causes, we must rise above our bitterness, lest we slip into despair. Bitterness can never produce peace. I have seen much anger that appears quite justifiable in our society, and even within our Church, but the real spiritual question for us is, "What will we do with this anger?" Will we allow it to crush us?

This weekend we commemorate the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the atomic bombs having been dropped in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Imagine the despair of the people when the full impact of those bombs was made manifest? Urakami Cathedral was obliterated, but the people insisted on rebuilding on the original site, and it stands proud and tall today. The Catholics there would not give up and even today, 70 years later, more than 100,000 survivors still live. Our faith has the capacity to fill us with kindness, compassion, making us "imitators of God," in the words of Saint Paul. This is the challenge.

Yes, Jesus truly is the living bread come down from heaven, bread that truly changes us. "Eternal God, in Whom mercy is endless and the treasury of compassion inexhaustible, look kindly upon us and increase Your mercy in us so that in difficult moments we might not despair nor become despondent, but with great confidence trust in Your Holy Will, which is Love and Mercy Itself."

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<sup>1</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. # 2091.