

Homily: 19th Sunday: 2015: Cycle B: 1 Kings 19:4-8; Ps. 34; Eph 4:30 – 5:2; Jn 6: 41-51
“Spiritual Encouragement in this Valley of Tears”

1. At times in this life, there is a real temptation to give up in the midst of difficulty. **Courage** or fortitude (spiritual strength) is needed to continue on during the tribulations of life. All of us should be able to relate to **Elijah** in the 1st reading, the great prophet of God who is **discouraged** by life and his circumstances. *Here is a man who fought for the true faith of Israel, who defeated the false prophets of Baal by the miraculous fire that came down from heaven to consume his offering after it had been drenched with water (see 1 Kings 18:38); who ended the drought in the land of Israel which had gone on for three and a half years through his prayerful intercession; and yet the King of Israel, Ahab, and the people still won't listen to Elijah and his saving message of truth concerning the Yahweh - the only true God! Elijah is ready to give up, and has fallen into a sleep of depression, attempting to escape his present dreadful state of existence. God sends an angel to encourage Elijah.* God tries to do the same in our lives when we feel down and out: *sending an invisible angel to encourage us or another human being to do the same.* All of us are called to lift up each other by kindness and spiritual concern. God by the angel gives the prophet Elijah some food and drink to lift up his downcast heart. But this is just of beginning of the process of encouragement, for natural consolation is not enough to lift our spirits entirely, i.e. food and drink, and so Elijah after feeling a bit better then falls back into the sleep of depression.
2. **But God doesn't give up:** the angel then again awakens Elijah and gives him encouraging words to pick up his spirit, and reminds him that it is a long journey (40 days) to the mountain of God (Heaven) and promises to support Elijah on his journey. The angel is showing the gift of **spiritual friendship**. All of us need some good spiritual friends who encourage us to persevere in the Christian way of life, amidst the pitfalls and sorrows of this passing world. The Church community helps us in this in a broad sense, but each of us should **pray** that God blesses us with one of two dear **spiritual friends** who in God's love will encourage us and call us to deeper holiness in the Lord (e.g., a good spiritual director or confessor).

But remember the standard by which true spiritual friends live by is the splendor of God's truth as made known to us through the gift of the Catholic faith - and not the standards of the passing world with all its compromises and selfish ways hidden under the slogan of "freedom." And a good spiritual friend is always full of **spiritual realism**, i.e., tells us the truth, but with love behind it: see the angel who didn't sugarcoat the fact that the journey to God's mountain (Heaven) was long, i.e., 40 days which in the Bible means a LONG time - but in the same breath made know that God promised to accompany Elijah on the long journey.

3. **Finally the greatest gift of spiritual encouragement is the Holy Eucharist:**

THE spiritual food for the journey of life to lead us to the mountain of God, i.e., Heaven. This is why Mass is the foundation for everything we do as Catholic Christians. It is also why when we are feeling down or discouraged by life that our spirits are picked up when we attend Mass and enter into the mystery of God's eternal love made manifest there through the renewal of Christ's one eternal Sacrifice for the salvation of the human race. This is also why by **spending time before Jesus in Eucharistic adoration** *our spirits are renewed, the problems of life are put into proper perspective, and we receive the courage carry on in our lives.* That was **the secret of the saints:** *love for the Holy Mass and for prayer before Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.* It was what gave them the strength to persevere to the end in the very trying and difficult circumstances of life. When we truly feel overwhelmed by life may we always remember the example of the saints, of the great prophets like Elijah, Jeremiah (see Jer 15:10-11; 20:14-18), Moses (Num 11:10-15; Ps 106: 32-33), and most of all Jesus (see Mt 26:36-46 in His agony in the Garden) who when tempted by spiritual depression, despondency, and despair turned to God in prayer, and to remember He gave us the Holy Eucharist as the perpetual memorial of His love, the spiritual food to give us the strength and courage to continue walking toward the mountain of God (Heaven) for 40 days and 40 nights. *It's a long journey, on a narrow path with many potential pitfalls, but God is with us in it and it leads to a glory beyond our imagining as Faith changes into the clear vision of Heaven.* God bless you.