

2018 19TH SUNDAY

Elijah- the greatest of all the Old Testament prophets- had hit the wall. He had had enough. He had striven mightily, pleading with his fellow Israelites not to backslide into paganism; trying to convince them of the supremacy of their God, Yahweh, over the Baals worshipped by their neighbours, the Canaanites; but all to no avail. The people much preferred the idolatrous, pornographic worship of the Baals to the pure worship of Yahweh. Elijah was detested by Queen Jezebel and had to hide out in the desert wilderness to protect himself from her assassins. He was sick of it all and lay down under a scrawny gorse bush and asked God for death.

Instead God sent an angel to feed him with hot scones and fresh water. Strengthened by the food and somewhat encouraged Elijah was able to continue his journey across the desert to the holy mountain called Horeb or Sinai. And here he enjoyed the radiant presence of Yahweh in a time of glorious ecstasy. Elijah then returned to Israel, re-energised, ready to take on paganism and the evil queen, face to face.

I'm sure many of us can empathise with Elijah. Perhaps it is our spouse, or our children, or our employer or our school teacher. We feel gutted by their unrealistic expectations of us, perhaps bullied, and stabbed in the back by the vicious way they speak of us. Like Elijah we cry out: "Lord I've had enough!"

It has been the experience of countless people throughout the ages that as soon as they cried out for help, the Lord Jesus came and gave them courage to face up to what afflicted them. This happens most dramatically at Mass. Having received Jesus as food and drink, people inevitably go out once again into the world so much stronger.

The tragedy is that in today's world so few choose to eat and drink of the Eucharist- opting- in times of turmoil- to just box on, trusting in their own strength.

How do we get people to appreciate the wondrous power of the Eucharist? How do we get people to recognise the infinite power of the Mass to strengthen us through the difficulties of life? This has been a constant theme in our 'With Hearts Burning' programme.

Perhaps a story might help.

Twenty five years ago I spent a wonderful holiday in England with very close friends: Edgar, Raewyn and their three young children.

A constant worry for Edgar and Raewyn was that Daniel, their 8 year old, had absolutely no appetite for any food that was not sweet. Every meal time there would be a battle of wits as Edgar and Raewyn tried to persuade Daniel to eat at least a morsel of his main course. Raewyn is a nurse and it is engrained into her that children should eat a well- balanced diet. Daniel's aversion to anything remotely healthy was a real worry for her.

For Edgar and Raewyn the family meal in the evening was precious family time. They wanted it to be a happy time- a time of laughter and joy; of being together after a busy day and being family together. They would not have dreamed of threatening Daniel with dire punishments if he did not eat up. But it really upset them that evening after evening there was this battle of wills with Daniel.

What they constantly did was to show their enjoyment of the good, nutritional food served and they often spoke of the new vitality they felt after eating it. They hoped this would awaken in their boy a hunger for proper food. Sometimes they bribed Daniel- especially when it came to Broccoli. Sometimes they won. Usually they lost. (In actual fact what they did achieve was to form Daniel into a brilliant debater. Ten years later he represented New Zealand in International Debating Competitions. Today he is a high-flying Judge of International Debates working out of Singapore so it wasn't all wasted energy!!).

The Church, like Raewyn the Mother, yearns for us to eat the very best of food. She offers us the Eucharist to eat and drink and tries to make it as attractive as possible to receive. She surrounds it with beautiful Liturgy and inspirational reflections on the Gospels.

God, our Father- pleads with us to receive the Eucharist. Jesus told us: "Anyone who eats this bread will live forever. It is My flesh, given for the life of the world."

And yet so many, like Daniel, have no appetite and refuse to eat and drink. They have no hunger. They do not feel the need.

So many of you, I know, are like Edgar and Raewyn. You love the Eucharist but your children refuse to be fed.

And all you can do is to be like Edgar and Raewyn and show to your children the obvious delight you have in receiving the Eucharist. You can display the spiritual fruits of Eucharist by your unselfish, joyous way of living. You can have a Cross and a religious picture on the walls of your lounge. You can have religious papers or magazines on your coffee table. You can have times of prayer in your home. All help in creating a love for Christ and a hunger for the Eucharist within your loved ones. But like Edgar and Raewyn with Daniel--- always gently, gently.

I love the Eucharist. I don't think I could survive as a priest without constantly receiving the Eucharist. Without it I suspect I would quickly flag in my enthusiasm for priesthood and like Elijah under the gorse bush- just give up. It is the source of my strength.

To come to the Eucharist is to drink deeply of refreshing water. Could we now sing together: *"Come to the Water, you who are thirsty, though you have nothing, I bid you come. And be filled with the good things I have to offer. Come. Listen. Live."*