

NINETEENTH SUNDAY OF O.T.

In today's second reading St. Paul writes: "... live in love as Christ loved us and handed himself over for us as a sacrificial offering to God as a fragrant aroma."

"Aroma" is a great metaphor as we continue to read from the Discourse on the Bread of Life.

For me at least, the aroma of the freshly baked bread draws me back to the memory of being loved and provided for.

The Eucharist bears the "aroma" of Jesus' sacrificial offering to God for our sake ...

... and in the Eucharist we celebrate Jesus' total self-gift of himself out of love for us.

This is what Jesus means when he says, "The bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world."

Jesus gave his flesh on the altar of the Cross ... and in the Eucharist we receive his flesh in the Sacrament of the altar.

Our reading from the Discourse on the Bread of Life is "interrupted" next weekend by the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary.

I encourage everyone to pick up their Bibles this week and read the section from Chapter 6 of John's Gospel that we are going to miss reading here in church.

Recent polls indicate that many Catholics are confused about the reality of Christ's Presence in the Eucharist.

And yet, Jesus insists: "My flesh is true food and my blood is true drink."

The Eucharist is not a symbol of Christ's Body and Blood; the Eucharist really is Christ's Body and Blood.

This is a profound mystery ... a mystery of profound love!

Jesus continues: "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him."

Whenever we receive the Eucharist we are receiving the Lord Jesus Christ himself: Body and Blood, soul and divinity, risen from the dead, present in our midst.

And ... in the simplest of terms ... we become what we eat ... or, in the case of the Eucharist, who we eat.

The purpose of receiving the Eucharist is to be transformed more and more into the likeness of Jesus.

And so I go back to where I began with St. Paul's challenge:

"Live in love as Christ loved us and handed himself over for us as a sacrificial offering to God as a fragrant aroma."

St. Paul urges us to live in this kind of love: A love that casts out all anger, bitterness, shouting, and reviling; a love that is kind, compassionate, and forgiving.

This all sounds beautiful - and it is - but it's not easy.

We sometimes falter on the path of love.

We can encounter people who just don't seem very lovable.

Our attempts to live in love as Christ loved us - which means loving in a self-less, sacrificial manner - can be met with rejection or even ridicule.

The journey of following Jesus can seem long, and on certain days, weariness and discouragement can gnaw at us.

Like Elijah in today's first reading, we might want to crawl under the nearest bush and sleep as long as possible.

But just as God sent his angel with food for Elijah - "Get up and eat, else the journey will be too long for you" ...

... so God the Father has sent us Jesus as the living bread come down from heaven. He is our "food for the journey."

His presence within us and our union with him gives us the strength we need to love as he has loved us.

Having been fed with the Bread of Life, we become filled with the aroma of Jesus, and so can bring the fragrance of Christ's healing, self-less love to others.