

[Readings: Ex. 16:2-4, 12-15; Ps. 78; Eph. 4:17, 20-24; John 6:24-35]

We live in a 24-hour society. Life never stops. Someone is always up and doing something. And it is never dark. Our cities light up the night. But it starts getting darker as we get older. We get afflicted with night blindness and find it hard to drive at night. It seems as though there is darkness inside now that intensifies the darkness outside.

Being “in the dark” can happen in broad daylight. Certainly the people talking to Jesus today are in the dark. They have not only seen the miracle of the loaves but also have been fed by that miracle. Yet they do not see the signs, says Jesus. Well, the signs are right there in front of them: the miracle itself, not at all hard to prove.

Moses is faced with it again and again in the desert. The escapees from Egypt see marvelous things in the desert – the cloud of fire, the smoke on Mount Sinai, the water from the rock, and yes, their very freedom from slavery. Yet they do not sense the presence of God among them, caring for them.

And so they complain, and about what? Food, of course! So God gives them manna. After the dew evaporates in the morning, something like coriander seed, from the carrot family, appears. In a sense, God gives them “carrot cake!” And still they complain about “this wretched food.” Come to think of it, I haven’t had a good slice of carrot cake in years! So God, aware of the laws of nature, guides the quail returning from their spring migration to Europe exhausted on the desert sands. Easily scooped up, they provide ready food for the traveler.

The word “manna” comes from the Hebrew question, “What is this?” What is this, indeed that God provides for the people day in and day out? Today’s Responsorial Psalm says that God “rained manna upon them for food and gave them heavenly bread.” Think of that at Communion time when you return to your pew. You have just received the Bread of Angels. You have just eaten the Bread from Heaven.

Manna from heaven is what we’re all waiting for. But we keep looking up to the sky to find it, instead of in the body of Christ, namely our sisters and brothers.

In what ways do you hunger and thirst? How can others, through God’s ways of holiness and truth, fulfill your needs? How can you fulfill the needs of others?

Jesus tells us that the work of God is to believe in the one he sent. How strong is your belief in Jesus? What could strengthen your faith?

Think about a time when you felt really famished -- your stomach growling and your head light. Imagine living a lifetime with that level of hunger. Pray for those whose hunger is not satisfied, and then do something to help feed them. Imagine a spiritual hunger at that same level of intensity. Perhaps those hungry souls are part of our parish or in the priestly community. Pray for ourselves and them to find fulfillment in Jesus.

Mark Twain once wrote, "I have known many troubles in my life, most of which never happened." I know about such troubles, too. These are the troubles looming just out in the future that occupy my mind in unguarded moments throughout the day or especially as I try to drift off to sleep. I can worry about world problems a little and local problems even more. But the problems that keep me up the most are parish and family problems. Or at least I portray them as problems in my mind.

I have worried about roofs leaking and basements flooding and paint peeling and rightly so. Remember the historic floods of four years ago? And now, due to roof and shingle damage, we now have black mold in certain parts of the rectory. Saint Paul warns the Ephesians in our Second Reading, "You must no longer live in the futility of your mind." He wants them to "put away the old self" and "be renewed in the spirit of your minds." So does the Archbishop of Detroit, Allen Vigneron.

It has been almost two years since the Archdiocesan Synod 2016 and over one year since the publication of the Archbishop's Pastoral Letter: "Unleash the Gospel." In the letter, he gives an introduction, lays down foundational convictions, gives a catechetical exposition, provides guideposts for a solution and then offers a conclusion.

In other words, Archbishop Vigneron identifies what the people of Synod 16 see as the strengths of the Catholics in our Archdiocese, our weaknesses, and how we can move as "joyful missionary disciples" from a Church focused on maintenance to one of mission.

To that end, we will be having a two-part presentation on "Unleash the Gospel" here at St. Martin de Porres Parish on Monday, August 20<sup>th</sup> and Monday, August 27<sup>th</sup>,

both starting at 7:00 PM in the parish hall. I would like to invite all of you to come to this workshop. It will be similar to the Parish Dialogue Session we had back in 2015.

In anticipation of that workshop, I ask those who are planning on attending to pick up a copy of the pastoral letter after Mass and sign up for the two evenings. We only have a limited number of copies of the letter, so please take one only if you are planning on attending one or both of the sessions. Read it in anticipation of the session. A warning: the first third of the letter is heavy in theology that even baffles me! But the next two parts are much easier to read and to digest!

I especially invite our Parish Pastoral Council, our Parish Finance Council, all of our Commissions, and all those involved in our parish activity. You won't be disappointed, and your input will help St. Martin's as we move into the future.

God once again feeds the people of Israel. Ironically, the name "Israel" can be translated as "the people who contended and fought with God." They are aptly named. And for being so stiff-necked and complaining, God allows them to wander in the desert for forty years. Why forty years? Because this insures that everyone from the original refugees from Egypt would die or would eventually die in the desert.

Thankfully, Jesus Christ does not let us wander aimlessly in the worldly darkness. The bread, the miraculous bread that He gives to the crowds and that He gives to us at this Mass, is the sign that we all want, that we all need, to see that He is here with us, and that we need to prevent the inner darkness from matching and melding with the darkness outside. This celebration keeps our eyes open and clear, so that we can always be sure of the road to the Kingdom of God.

"Sir, give us this bread always!" AMEN!

[Readings: I Kings 19:4-8; Psalm 34; Ephesians 4:30-5:2; John 6:41-51]

Have you ever had “one of those days?” “One of those weeks?” I am strongly attracted to the scene in today’s First Reading involving Elijah under the broom tree. First of all, what is a “broom tree?” I didn’t know what it was, so in my vivid imagination, I thought it was an aluminum pole with broomsticks sticking out of it! Actually, it is a juniper tree. It grows to be like a huge broccoli plant with a tall stem and “just enough” branches with needles to provide shade for only one person resting underneath it. I’ve been under the broom tree plenty of times.

Elijah says, “This is enough, O Lord! Take my life. Please.” It might sound like a stand-up comic delivering the classic joke. Do you remember the comic Henny Youngman? He was popular for over fifty years in the last century. His famous line was “Take my wife...Please! He was the guest entertainer at our very first Presbyteral Convocation up at Boyne Mountain back in 1985. He was flown in and his speaker’s fee was covered by an anonymous donor. His first line when got on stage was, “This is a tough room. 300 Roman Catholic priests and an 80-year-old JEW! He brought down the house!

“Take my wife, please” brings a smile. But when Elijah says, “Take my LIFE, PLEASE, it’s not something to laugh about. He and I am very sincere as we speak those words.

I was always trembling under the broom tree during finals week in college and in the seminary, weighing death a better option than that last big push to learn what four months of classes and books hadn’t taught me. I found myself hopelessly swooning under the tree every time relationships failed to fulfill their lofty promises. I was swept under the broom tree when seemingly endless parish problems knock the wind out of my sails. And when loved ones started dying all around me too young and too soon, it suddenly occurs to me that it would be far easier on my heart if I just went with them.

When I watch the evening news, I find myself drifting into a stream of thought not unlike the prayer of lament found so often in the books of the prophets and in the Book of Psalms.

Enough, O Lord, of wars and violence, crime and disease, of famine and hunger! Enough of children being kidnapped or killed and wives abused! Enough terrorism and fear! Enough hatred and injustice! Lord, how can You tolerate it for so many centuries?

Elijah had a particularly tough vocation. He was a fire-and-brimstone prophet to a megalomaniac king and his steely-eyed queen, a murderous pair willing to slaughter the prophets of God in preference to their false god, Baal.

Elijah performed mighty signs in the name of God. In spite of that, he is hunted and hounded to the point of exhaustion by a threat on his life, so Elijah sits down and prays for death. And then, like most of us carrying a burden too heavy to bear for long, his grief gives way to the grateful escape of sleep.

Like Elijah, we've all had moments of despair. How did God find you during these times, or more precisely, how did you find God and hope? God does not expect the impossible from us. When life is overwhelming, an angel arrives with comfort and the assurance of God's all-powerful presence.

He assures Elijah – and us -- that there still is more to do, but he doesn't just deliver the message. He also sets the table. Nourished and emboldened by this food, Elijah walks 40 days and nights more.

When God sets the table here, the meal is plenty satisfying. He gives us “just enough” to resume the journey. Bread from heaven is more than starch and oil and yeast. It revives the soul in a way that the finest offering from your favorite bakery cannot. When the soul is willing, the body follows. Ordinary folks become absolute saints, and we become joyful, missionary disciples. Speaking of which, don't forget to sign up for our discussion sessions on the Archbishop's pastoral letter, “Unleash the Gospel.” It will be food for your souls for the journey! The sign-up sheet is in the back of church by the Holy Family shrine. Be sure to take a copy of the letter with you.

Speaking of faith journeys, it is time for us to recruit new members for the parish RCIA program.

If you or someone you know is an adult in need of the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation or First Eucharist, please let me know. If you are

interested in becoming a Roman Catholic, or are searching for a faith community, if the Lord is calling you, call me!

In our Gospel for today, the crowds around Jesus resisted His claims of a “living bread from heaven.” Perhaps they weren’t hungry enough, desperate enough, or aware enough of their own need to embrace this offer. This is not a meal to be taken lightly. It does not only nourish, it likewise obliges. Jesus says He will not reject those who come to Him. Do you ever fear rejection by Jesus? Examine the causes of your concerns. Trust in God’s mercy and goodness.

And after the meal, there is a journey to be taken, of days and miles and opportunities in the service of life. We will be given what we need to take this journey, but it is up to us to start walking. St. Paul reminds us in our Second Reading of the excess baggage that weighs us down on the journey: bitterness, fury, anger, shouting and reviling. What situations infuriate you the most or spur feelings of bitterness or malice? What steps can you take to remember Jesus in the heat of those moments? He also reminds us what items we DO need to pack before we leave, or to discover on the way: kindness, compassion, forgiveness.

We bring both when we assemble for Sunday Mass. And we place them on God’s altar along with bread and wine for God to bless and to transform into life-giving grace. And we learn that life indeed is worth living after all. AMEN!

[Readings: Rev. 11:19a; 12:1a-6a, 10 ab; Ps. 45; 1 Cor 15:20-27; Lk. 1:39-56]

August traditionally is the month dedicated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, as given to us during the apparitions of Mary in Fatima back in 1917.

How do we know Mary best? As with anyone, her key is in her heart. Jesus said, "For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be" (Mt 6:21). We know from the Magnificat that Mary's treasure is her Son.

Scripture references Mary's heart twice, both in the second chapter of Luke's Gospel (verses 19 and 51). We learn that Mary "reflects" and "keeps" in her heart the mysterious events surrounding the Incarnation. Intertwined with her core identity is the identity of her Son and that of His mission as Redeemer and Savior. Mary's *fiat* ("yes") was the portal through which God chose to allow Himself to begin His saving work. Mary's *fiat* remedied Adam and Eve's "no," showing us the way to her Son, Who is the remedy for all sin. The Virgin Mother is the channel through which God brings healing balm to humanity's sinfulness, through whom we experience the fullness of grace. She who is "full of grace" presents to us and leads us to her Son.

Today we celebrate the day when God brought the Blessed Virgin Mary into the Heavenly Home prepared for her. Mary is the Mother of the Church because she is the Mother of God. After her Son, Mary most clearly embodies God's saving plan, the way of living that Jesus preached. She was most like her Son in His self-sacrifice for the sake of humanity. Mary followed her Son, "the first fruits of those who have died into everlasting glory" as St. Paul says, because she followed her Son along the ways of God's Kingdom on earth.

The image found in today's First Reading is traditionally interpreted as a reference to Mary in Heaven: "She gave birth to a son, a male child, destined to rule all the nations with an iron rod." But the image is also one for the Church, the living Body of Christ for all generations: the woman who fled into the desert where she had a place prepared by God." The Church is still in "the desert."

We know that in Old Testament times, “the desert” was the dwelling place of the devil and evil spirits. Jesus teaches us in the New Testament that “the desert” is a place where He goes on retreat, to be one with His Father in prayer. Such is the desert for us: both a place of sin, rejection and abandonment, and a place of renewal and rebirth.

As the “woman clothed with the sun” enters the desert, we too once again are forced into the desert by national and international events. We call upon Mary, our heavenly Mother, especially in this time of war and violence in the world, and scandal and crisis in our Church. When we are tempted to anger, despair or even the loss of our faith, let us turn to Mary’s Immaculate Heart for comfort. Let us be resolved to work for justice, for reconciliation and healing, in our world and in our Church, secure under Mary’s loving protection.

Mary’s Assumption into Heaven is God’s testimony that Mary, the one most like her Son, already shares in the triumph of God’s risen life. You and I share in the same promise, the same hope that Mary now enjoys. You and I are still walking the pilgrim way of faith on earth. Our eternal destiny has not yet come to pass. So what do we do in the meantime?

We welcome the Word of God into our lives. Each morning we rededicate our day to being the servant of the Lord. Instead of saying, “Lord, here’s what I want you to do for me today...” we can ask, “Lord, what do YOU want me to do today to show Your presence in the world? How can I magnify YOU?”

We make choices that embrace the culture of life. We make choices that respect and celebrate life, and we reject anything that will harm us or bring us closer to our death or the death of others.

We ask the Lord to open our eyes and our ears to hear the cry of the poor; not only the materially and financially poor, but those who need someone there to listen, to counsel, to support. We show mercy and justice when others are in need of it. We remember that wherever we go, whatever we do, whatever good or evil we have to endure; Jesus and Mary are watching us, interceding for us, protecting us and loving us. Where they have gone, we hope to follow. AMEN



[Readings: Proverbs 9:1-6; Psalm 34; Ephesians 5:15-20; John 6:51-58]

There's an old Hagar the Horrible cartoon in which the heavysset Viking manages to pull himself to the top of a snowy mountain. A monk-like fellow sits at the top, serenely facing the icy wind in his scant robe and bare feet. Hagar asks, "What is the secret of happiness?" The monk replies, "These four things: poverty, fasting, abstinence, and celibacy." Hagar looks concerned. Finally he asks sheepishly, "Is there anybody else up here I can talk to?"

We may well want a second opinion when wisdom speaks its truth to us. Often it says precisely what we don't want to hear; this may explain why wisdom is not routinely practiced. In the Bible, foolishness is regularly portrayed as having a superficial but popular appeal, not realizing that we are destroying ourselves when we make the wrong decisions. They take delight in displaying their own unconsidered opinions. If their mouths don't bring them to ruin, their actions most certainly will. It is no wonder that Proverbs includes the lament, "The father of a numbskull has no joy."

Meanwhile Wisdom calls aloud in the streets, issuing a sober warning and offering a welcome invitation. To come to her house is to approach the threshold of understanding. To accomplish the goal is as simple as its end: "The beginning of wisdom is, get wisdom; at the cost of all you have, get understanding." The first step to being wise is to determine that wisdom is what you're after. A psalm says that "The beginning of wisdom is the fear, awesome reverence, of the Lord."

If we are honest, some of us will admit that wisdom isn't necessarily what we're after. We want a certain freedom from care, which we suspect money and security and popularity may provide. We want to belong, and we don't want to rock the boat too much. If we have to finesse the truth or close an eye on justice once in a while to attain that relative comfort and calm, many of us are willing to do that. Wisdom sets her table, but we may have made other plans.

Such a lack of wisdom leads to horrific consequences. The news has been filled this week with reports of depravity and cover-ups and sin in our

Church. Included in today's bulletin is a letter from Archbishop Vigneron addressing the events and the news of the turmoil in our Church.

Equally disturbing, Jesus is still earnestly engaged in telling the crowds that unless they eat His flesh and drink His blood, they will not have life within them. The Greek word used here is to "gnaw" – as predators tear their victim's carcasses to pieces. The people are appalled. This is understandable. It is an outrageous idea. Those who have spent a lifetime trying not to rock the boat, those willing to blind themselves to the demands of justice do not want the kind of intimate union with Jesus that He is asking for. He offers a word to the wise: Those who share His body and blood will have eternal life given to them and will be raised on the last day. Not many are wise, and they do not glimpse the truth that is being revealed to them.

But do we? John's Gospel was written at the end of the first century, for Christians who had been sitting with the Good News for two generations. This discourse is more for the mature Christian than the first hearer: Will you remain in this vital Communion or not? Will you stay close to this table or separate yourself from the Source of Life? The Church takes several weeks of this liturgical year to savor this passage from John about the living bread, because it is at the center of our lives as Christians. John's Gospel does not tell the story of the Last Supper's "institution narrative." Eucharist is instituted right here, in the midst of the crowd, in the offer of a share in the life of Jesus. Eucharist is, in a sense, presented not to the committed circle but offered widely, the way Wisdom spreads her invitation. How many will reply?

When the clergy sex scandal first broke out back in 2002, Bishop Ken Untener of Saginaw said something profound about the reaction of the faithful who stayed in the Church in spite of the scandal.

He said, "Do you know what the biggest miracle is in all of this sin and scandal and division? The fact that you still are coming to church on Sundays!" The fact that you continue to serve the Lord with your prayer, service and material support.

If the Church was merely a human institution, it would have been destroyed centuries ago. But the Holy Spirit of Truth and Wisdom is here, in this place, in each one of you who build up the Body of Christ. And that is the greatest wisdom and miracle of all. AMEN!

[Readings: Joshua 24:1-2a, 15-17, 18b; Psalm 34; Eph 5:21-32; Jn 6:60-69]

“As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”

“This saying is hard; who can accept it?”

“Be subordinate to one another out of reverence for Christ.”

“This saying is hard; who can accept it?”

“Wives should be submissive to their husbands in everything.”

“THIS saying is hard; who can accept it?”

There’s been some hard sayings in the news over the past two weeks.

Father Thomas Berg is a priest of the Archdiocese of New York and author of the book, [\*Hurting in the Church: A Way Forward for Wounded Catholics\*](#). He spoke about the challenges Catholics face amid the Church’s sexual abuse and misconduct scandals.

With everything that has been coming out in the news recently about sexual abuse and its cover-up in the Church, a very common reaction is one of betrayal. Especially persons who for years have collaborated with bishops, worked in chanceries, worked for bishops, collaborated in apostolates, have headed up bishop’s capital campaigns, have been donors and so on. Part of the very common experience is this raw emotional wound of betrayal. *Where is Jesus in the midst of this crisis?*

Jesus is the Healer of wounds, and Jesus does not leave the members of His mystical body without healing when we seek it.

And those wounds are opened up. This is where not only can Jesus bring healing, but He can also use that experience of woundedness, whether that is personally or institutionally or spiritually as the Body of Christ. He uses those wounds to bring greater good, to bring grace and healing to His Church.

The Jesus who comes into this experience is Jesus who appeared with His glorious wounds. Even after His glorious Resurrection, the wounds were still there. The wounds are mystically important, and we can unite our wounds to Jesus and allow Him to unite those in a mystical way, in a redemptive way, to His redemptive work.

There is also anger. There is certainly such a thing as just anger. Hopefully that anger gets channeled into good, positive action steps. That is a very healthy starting point to getting to a better place. In this context, it is an important part of rightly channeling our energies and our reactions prayerfully and in docility to the Holy Spirit. We have to allow the Holy Spirit to come fully into that experience of hurt in this ecclesial context.

Catholic radio host and author Teresa Tomeo has this to say: “Is the Eucharist real? Are the Church teachings about Jesus in the Eucharist true? Are all the other teachings true?” If we really believe in the Eucharist and the other beautiful teachings of the Church, then one doesn’t walk away when the situation gets really tough.

During the Church scandals of his days, St. Francis de Sales called such behavior spiritual murder. He cautions that anyone who chooses to leave the Church because of the scandalous behavior of others commits spiritual suicide. If what the Church teaches and tries to live out is true, then we stay. We stay to fight for those truths and help others fight for them as well.

Over the centuries in the history of our Church, Teresa Tomeo says, it has often been the laity that was responsible for getting the battered and often bruised Barque of Peter back on course. Now is not the time to abandon ship. Now is the time to roll up our sleeves and get busy through prayer, fasting, respectful and direct feedback and involvement, and help guide the Church through these latest troubled waters, all because she carries with her the cargo of truth.

In other words, Fr. Michael Schmitz, a Catholic priest/blogger says it this way: “Don’t LEAVE, LEAD!”

Jesus knew from the beginning the ones who would not believe and the one who would betray him. As a result of this, many of His disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied Him. “Do you also want to leave?”

What moments of truth have you had? What made you choose the path you took? Psalm 34 tells us that God is close to the brokenhearted and crushed in spirit. How have you experienced that truth?

Authority and obedience are key concerns in Paul’s Letter to the Ephesians. What struggles do you have in these areas? The apostles believe Jesus has the words of eternal life. Do you? Why do you stay with Jesus and His Church?

“Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God.”

“As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.” AMEN!