

[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!