

[Readings: Ex. 16:2-4, 12-15; Ps. 69; Eph. 4:17, 20-24; John 6:24-35]

Announce passing of long-time cantor Walter Adamczyk and minimal flood damage on church basement floor.

In today's First Reading, 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, even 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. God gives them “carrot cake” for breakfast! And still they complain about “this wretched food.” 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 bread from heaven.”

Think of that at Communion time when you return to your pew. You have just received the Bread of Angels. The Bread from Heaven. But that bread does not only “come down from Heaven. It rises from the soil in the form of bread and wine and from the very Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ, and rises up BACK to 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 in the Eucharist, as well as in 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 feed the poor.

Imagine a SPIRITUAL hunger at that same level of intensity. Perhaps those hungry souls are part of our parish or the larger community. Maybe in your own family and in your own home.

Pray for yourself and them to find fulfillment in Jesus.

God once again feeds the people of Israel. Ironically, the name "Israel" can be translated as "the people who contended and fought with God." Can you imagine OUR country with such a name? 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 generation of refugees from Egypt would die or would eventually die in the desert.

Thankfully, Jesus Christ does not let us wander aimlessly in today's worldly darkness. The bread, the miraculous bread that He gives to the crowds and that He gives to us, 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 our inner darkness from matching and melding with the darkness outside.

Every celebration of the Mass keeps our eyes open and clear so that we can always be sure of the road to the Kingdom of God.

Regarding our Second Reading from St. Paul, 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 so. But the problems that keep me up the most are parishioner and family problems. Or at least I portray them as problems in my mind.

I have also worried about budgets and staff concerns, roofs leaking and basements flooding and paint peeling and black mold and rightly so.

Remember the historic floods of ten years ago? We had another taste of it this week. The church basement flooded, but not the four feet we got in 2014. Just a light

rinse! Remember what I had you say before my homily ten years ago? I had only been here for six weeks, and Fr. Roman was at St. Lawrence Parish. Before my homily the following weekend, at the count of three, I instructed the congregation to say, "This never happened when Fr. Roman was here!" You shouted that! Remember? And that's when I fell in love with you. And, I hope, you with me!

Saint Paul warns the Ephesians in our Second Reading, "You must no longer live in the futility of your mind." He wants them and us to "put away the old self" and "be renewed in the spirit of your minds."

The brain is imperfect, inefficient, untidy and easily distracted. It also has the unnerving tendency to forget things whenever we're trying to remember something important. I remember words and people's name five seconds after they have walked away. You, too?

Our thoughts often run in circles like a hamster on its wheel, getting nowhere in a big hurry. Do you agree? Many is the afternoon I'd just like to hang up my brain like an old hat and be rid of the madness within, if only for a few hours. After all, isn't that why God invented television? Changing the channel is precisely what the Letter to the Ephesians urges on us here. But it's not mindless escapism to which we're invited, though, but "fresh, spiritual thinking."

The empty-headed might follow the hamster around on his wheel, but those who've "learned Christ" have access to the truth that sets us free from more of the same. The lesson we learn in Christ isn't just a moral teaching, or even a whole catalog of instructions. We learn a Way, THE Way – discipleship -- which involves listening to Christ, and forming a relationship with Him.

This week, find a quiet place to calm down, sit down and quiet down, so that we can hear the voice of Jesus above the roar of stuff in the brain that's always trying to drag us back into circular ways of thinking and behaving.

We have options, of course. We can pattern ourselves after the grumblers in the Exodus wilderness. Conditions in life don't meet our expectations; our seemingly unheard prayers are not answered as we would like, and so we get worked up about it.

God responds to the Israelites through Moses – and to us through Jesus Christ --

with something beyond our wildest dreams, and the mumbling quiets down. Until the next time.

When worries come and you are living in the futility of your mind, turn your worry over to God, who loves you even more than you love your own family. Then get a good night's sleep. Like Pope Saint John XXIII. Every night, he would kneel next to his bed in the papal bedroom, and say these words: "Almighty God, I have spent this long day solving all the problems of the Church. I am tired and I am going to bed. You take over while I sleep!"

Mortal thoughts are never far from looking back in the past, or fretting about the future. Yet fresh, spiritual thinking gets our minds off mere maintaining, and launches us into creative considerations of why we're given this life to begin with.

Discover Christ, and learn a new Way of seeing, believing, loving and living. "Lord, give us this food always!" AMEN!

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

When undertaking a journey -- whether it is a vacation, a pilgrimage, relocation, or your life-voyage as a whole -- you need to prepare appropriately. Under-packing is dangerous. Over-packing is burdensome. Lugging the wrong equipment is frustrating. Every inch and every ounce of luggage has to be made to count. Some things are always useful, no matter where you're headed.

Maybe Elijah failed to bring good humor along that day he fled into the desert. King Ahab and Queen Jezebel were out for his blood, true, but throwing himself under a broom tree and praying for death was not a helpful response to his dilemma. Also, he went on a day's journey into the desert without water and food. While accustomed to living by a spring with ravens bringing him sustenance, he might have been pushing his luck this time. Evidently, Elijah was unfamiliar with the saying: God helps those who help themselves.

Elijah was despairing -- again. This time it wasn't only famine and drought. His land and king had gone bad, the prophets who might have pointed things in a better direction were dead, and someone wanted to kill him, and so he decided to lie down under a tree and wait to die. "Enough, Lord, I've had enough. Take me."

Have you ever had "one of those days?" "One of those lives?" I am strongly attracted to this 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 look 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 an anonymous donor covered his speaker’s fee. He was tall and husky like me. His first line when got on stage was, “This is a gonna be tough room to entertain. 300 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 are very sincere as we speak those words.

I was always trembling “under the broom tree” during final exams 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 had not yet taught me. I found myself hopelessly swooning “under the broom 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 to join them in eternity.

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 adults and children being kidnapped, abused or killed! Enough terrorism and fear! Enough hatred and injustice! Lord, how can You tolerate it for so many centuries?

In what ways do YOU want to chuck it all, “sit under a tree of despair and pray for death?” And then, how does God send YOU an angel to nudge you forward and give you strength and hope for life’s journey? Who is that angel in YOUR life?

It could be in the form of an unanticipated reprieve, a phone call or a sudden visitor, a friend, a stranger’s kind word, or what we often call a “lucky break.” Grace arrives and a bridge appears over troubled waters, enabling us to cross to the other side unscathed. It’s the hour when we might remember to say:

“Taste and see the goodness of the Lord!”

In today’s Second Reading, St. Paul reminds us 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? When we act out on those emotions, we “sadden the Holy Spirit” that is within us. What steps can you take to remember Jesus in those moments?

St. Paul also reminds us what items we DO need to pack before we leave, or to discover on the way: kindness, compassion, forgiveness. We bring this to church 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.

As we journey together after Mass, the single most critical item to take -- on any journey -- is confidence in God. Confidence literally means, "With faith." I do not go on this journey through life alone. God is my co-pilot, or at least God is somewhere in the car with us! In traffic, I saw a bumper sticker that says, "God is my co-pilot." Then both our cars passed a church where the marquis sign read, "If God is your co-pilot, you need to switch seats!" God will provide the bread for us, as well as the road we're on, when GOD is our ultimate destination. AMEN!



[Readings: Prov. 9:1-6; Ps. 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. 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." As Curly from the Three Stooges would say, "Why Soi-tenly! Nyuk, nyuk, nyuk!"

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 occasionally 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.

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. Does Jesus want us to be cannibals? Humans eating humans?

The concept is not so foreign. When the pagan neighbors of the Israelites conquered their enemies in battle, it was not unusual for the victors to pour the blood of their slain enemies into chalices of victory and drink their blood. The theory was that one, blood is a source of life, and two, drinking the blood of war heroes might give them additional courage in battle.

The Greek word used by Jesus is not to "eat," but 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 understand the truth that is being revealed to them. We will see next Sunday how the crowds

relate to this so-called “Good News” shared by Jesus Christ. Spoiler alert! Their response is NOT the one Jesus hoped for!

What is OUR understanding of these words of Jesus? 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 Chapter 6 of John’s Gospel, the “Bread of Life” discourse, because it is at the center of our lives as Christians. Eucharist is, in a sense, presented not to an exclusive club membership, but is offered widely, the way Wisdom spreads her invitation. How many will of you reply?

I close with this story from Fr. Dominic Grassi, a retired priest from Chicago.

This story takes place when he is a teen-ager, visiting a pastor who lived and ministered in the sleepy farming village where his dad and uncles were born. The pastor invites the young Dominic to spend a Monday with him. The day started with a drive deep into the farm fields. An old shack with smoke rising from its stack was the only building in sight. Dominic continues the story:

We stopped. I understood that he wanted me to stay in the car. He went in, and five minutes later came out with a round loaf of bread a full two feet wide. He explained to me that was his weekly loaf, while he broke off two warm pieces for us to eat. Dare I say it was heavenly? Nothing like freshly baked, warm bread!

On the way home, he explained to me that today the bread stood alone with just butter and other spreads. On Tuesday, still fresh, it would make great sandwiches. On Wednesday, chunks would be broken off to absorb gravy from sauces. Thursday it would

be cubed as part of a hearty salad. Friday, the dried pieces would be put into the vegetable soup to thicken it. Saturday, drizzled with olive oil, some would be mixed with water and fresh tomato wedges. And the remaining stale remnants would be ground into breadcrumbs to mix with grated cheese to sprinkle over Sunday pasta.

Nothing was wasted. Each day saw a new use for the bread. And a new loaf would begin the process again on Monday. Fr. Rossi concludes the story with this lesson: The Bread of Life comes to us in many different forms, but always from the same loving, nourishing source. Will you come and sit at the table of God's Wisdom in His Word that is broken open, and at the table of the Sacrament, where the bread is broken and given to us a real food, and let it form you as that country priest formed and shaped the bread in his kitchen?

AMEN!

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

“Decide today whom you will serve: the Lord your God, or the gods of the pagans.” These were the last words of Joshua to the Chosen People. Their response? “Far be it for us to forsake the Lord.” But guess what? After the death of Joshua, the Israelites DID forsake the Lord. After a while, their spiritual enthusiasm petered out, the flame of faith snuffed out, and like many of the disciples of Jesus, “they returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied Him.”

The theologian Rudolf Bultmann didn’t start it. But he was the one who stated it most memorably. Everything Jesus says or does is intended to lead us to the moment of decision where we choose Him or we refuse Him.

Surely, we have choices to make every step along the journey of faith as His disciples. Come follow or stay behind. Seek peace or take up the sword. Serve God or serve money. Build on rock that lasts or on sand that slips away. Tend to the dead or choose the way of life. Open your eyes or remain blind. Get up and walk or stay where you are. Go up to Jerusalem or return to Galilee. Seek the Kingdom or settle for the world. Either we are For Christ or against Him. Jesus doesn’t allow us to shift into neutral or give a response of “no comment.”

And let’s be clear: Any decision we make has consequences, good or bad. Look at how we still may be “slaves” to our past, our resentments, our addictions, our bad habits. The only unacceptable answer to the challenge of faith is to say, “yes” HERE and then go out and do “no” THERE.

“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.” They went back to their former lives. As if Jesus never existed. As if Jesus made no impression on them or on their lives, other than feeding them a Happy Meal. To me, this is the saddest verse in the Gospel of John. How sad indeed.

The decisive question continues to be posed because each new generation has to address it. All generations here at Mass today have to address

it. We can be baptized and still say “no.” We can receive our First Communion and have our faith ratified at Confirmation and still say “no.”

We can journey with Jesus as members of His Church and determine one day that we’ll go no further. We stop practicing the Catholic Faith. Also, we can be faithful churchgoers all our lives, yet at the critical hour, when we must stand up and speak out, we may waffle and stammer and look away, or remain silent, making a lie of it all.

“Are you with Me or do you also want to leave?” Peter’s answer remains the best, but we can only repeat it if we mean it. Peter says: “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.”

Life is here. Love is here. Challenge is here. The cross is here. Forgiveness is here. The choice is ours.

Do you realize what we have here, folks? Do you realize what you are receiving here when you receive Holy Communion?

Do you let what is here transform you? Your very body and blood are mixed with His! Your very soul is united with His soul!

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 tough.

We are to take the Body and Blood of Christ, which we have received HERE and bring it out THERE. We are to become the salt of the earth and the light of the world. We are to be the eyes and ears, the hands and feet, the heart and soul of Jesus. The best compliment we can receive from strangers, from pilgrims, from atheists and from fallen away Catholics is: “See how they love one another!” “See how they help the poor.” “See how they teach their children.” “See

And, to me, most importantly, “I want what YOU have!”

Eating Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament should change us, transform us, and leave its mark. It should be clear to the forces of evil, to the world, to our neighbors, and to ourselves that our decision to eat the Bread from Heaven is a powerful thing that leads to action.

We can choose, or we can refuse. If we refuse, then we lose!

Just a final word on the place of the family, especially based on today's Second Reading. We forget how it starts. St. Paul says couples are equals! "Brothers and sisters, be subordinate to ONE ANOTHER." But then what he says next is NOT equal. It's not balanced.

Wives should respect their husbands as head of the household, but husbands are expected to give up their very lives for their wife and family. As Christ gave up his life for HIS bride, the Church.

So, if I had to choose between respecting a higher authority and giving up my very life, as the expression goes, "I'll take vanilla!"

Husbands and wives are equal, but not identical. If you are married, then you have learned that indeed, as the book title says, "Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus!"

We hear that the head of a married couple and of the family is the husband/father. But I also heard a wise woman say, "The man may be the head, but the woman is the neck, and the neck moves the head."

Parents are called to be steady, righteous examples to their children so that the children can develop spiritually, morally and physically. Children are a gift from God and not the property of parents. This is in contrast to the Roseanne television show when she says, "these kids are the only thing Dan and I own outright." No, Roseanne, these kids" are "on loan" to you from God.

Parents will stand in judgment as to how they treat these gifts. A Christian Catholic family should be a miniature Church.

Family members teach each other and strengthen each other in faith and they outdo each other in acts of charity. One priest always says in his wedding homilies that husbands and wives are called to get each other into Heaven. They pray for and with each other. They can learn the faith of their ancestors. And the Body of Christ is born again and risen again and lives again for another generation!

Many questions to ponder this week. See which one speaks the most to your heart:

What decisive moments have you had in your life? What made you choose the path you took? What were the consequences of that choice?

Psalm 34 tells us that God is close to the brokenhearted and crushed in spirit. How have you experienced that truth in your life?

Authority and obedience are key concerns in Paul's Letter to the Ephesians. What struggles do you have with authority and obedience?

And finally, the apostles believe Jesus has the words of eternal life. Do you? Why do you stay with Jesus and accompany Him?

Choose or refuse and lose!

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