



## August 12, 2018 - Taught by God Given by Rev. Mattei

We all have experience of good days and bad days; of days when we feel at the top of the world, basking in our accomplishments, enjoying the acknowledgment and appreciation of those around us, and days when nothing seems to go right; when the world caves in and the light goes out; days when we feel disappointed, disillusioned, deflated and discouraged. I don't know why it is that when we go through a negative spell, a threat, a criticism the unpleasant event crowds out the enjoyable memories of more affirming and supporting experiences.

This is possibly the emotional turbulence Elijah must have gone through ([1 Kings 19:4-8](#)). After he enjoyed a tremendous [victory](#) over king Ahab's false prophets he heard of queen Jezebel's anger and threat and [flew for his life](#). Elijah was a prophet of the Lord who wasn't merely having a religious squabble with king Ahab's prophets. Speaking on behalf of Yahweh who had sent him to denounce [the king's evil ways](#), he was engaging in political speech. In fact, that is what all prophets of Yahweh have been sent to do: to expose Israel's defilement of the covenant of the Lord who liberates from the oppression of evil. This could only mean that the people of Israel had embraced [death over life](#), which is fatally opposed to [God's will](#).

The Church has embraced the prophetic tradition of denouncing evil through the challenging words and heroic actions of servants who love God above their very life. This week we remember Fr. Maximilian Kolbe, a Polish Franciscan friar who volunteered to die in place of a stranger in the German death camp of Auschwitz, and the Reverend Kaj Munk, a Danish playwright and Lutheran pastor, known for his cultural engagement and his martyrdom during the Occupation of Denmark of World War II. Throughout the centuries we have numerous examples of prophets who have spoken truth to power and lost their life as a consequence. Unfortunately, we also have numerous abhorrent examples in the history of the Church of power abuse, truth distortion and employment of violence, such as the destruction of cultures during colonial times, the persecution of the Jews, the ambivalence over slavery, the resistance to grant civil rights, the indifferent or fearful silence over or the open support of fascism, racism, sexism...

One wonders what went on in the church of Ephesus to prompt the writer of the letter to the same church to stress the baptismal conviction that we are all called by God to be members one of the other: stop falsehood, watch out not to go to bed angry, don't go and steal, wash your mouth and do not grieve the Holy Spirit ([Ephesians 4:25-5:2](#)). Jesus has reconciled us to God therefore let's forgive one another and let us be imitators of God in loving our neighbor. Conflict within the community of believers exposes people's ignorance of what God has done by putting together Jews and Gentiles, something so contradictory and unheard of that people needed to be proud of and witness to the rest of the world. It's like saying now that God has put together in the Spirit the Body of Christ made up of conservatives and liberals and they do not kill each other but work for the growth of the whole. That's why the writer commands: [Do not grieve the Spirit!](#)

Elijah was blessed by the divine intervention of an angel who twice made sure that Elijah ate and got strengthened for the long journey. We as well cannot survive the difficult moments of our life journey unless we have God-sent angels that nurture and support us: prayers, hugs, cards, a listening ear, a forgiving and compassionate word, testimonials of love and reminders of the promises of God. Such people are true companions on the journey.

In today's gospel ([John 6:35.41-51](#)) the Jews seem confused and offended at the words of Jesus, who speaks of himself as the bread of heaven. Those who were trained in the Holy Scriptures and the story of salvation were familiar with the explanation that Moses gave to the people of Israel in the desert when they asked "What is it?" or "Man hu?" (the word that gives us manna): this is bread the Lord has given you ([Ex 16:15](#)). This, Jesus says of himself, is the bread (v. 50); this is the one who will give you eternal life if you but believe.

The Jews' difficulty to believe was in regards to Jesus' identity: he seemed too human to be divine and too common to be special (the "We know his family!" of v. 42). But in fact, Jesus (his life, the values he embodies, the experience of his death, the meaning of his resurrection) is the daily bread we need for the holy journey. God calls us to full (or eternal) life in Jesus and Jesus reveals to us the justice, compassion and vision of God. The Spirit (or identity, passion and dedication) of Jesus is available to us on a daily basis. This is food for the journey God offers us. This is the teaching we are invited to receive and trust.

In the simplicity of daily life we are empowered to embody the Bread of Heaven for others to feed on. The seal of the Spirit that claims us for God is also a promise of the power of God operating in us. In that power we learn to be kind, tenderhearted, and to

forgive one another, imitating God, as beloved children, living in love as Christ loved us, giving himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God ([Eph 5:1-2](#)). Let us approach Jesus, the Bread of Life, trusting the power of his presence in us.