

Faith is a vital element in our growing process with God. Our Gospel today presents to us a marvelous teaching about Jesus' real identity. Jesus presents Himself before the crowds as someone capable of giving true and eternal life to those who believe in Him.

However, we cannot dismiss those famous criticisms that came from His people. Jesus responds to those criticisms by showing to them His true identity, and He presents Himself as an authentic food capable of bringing eternal life.

One of those criticisms had to deal with His origin. Since people knew Jesus' family it was so difficult for them to conceive in their minds that Jesus had a divine origin. So, how is it possible that an ordinary man, like them, could be source of eternal life?

Before He demonstrated that He truly came from the Father—divine origin—Jesus makes a statement saying that if they fail in recognizing Him is due to their little faith. And the lack of faith somehow shuts the door of our life to God. Not to believe in Jesus implies not to believe in God, because it is only in Jesus that the fullness and definite revelation of the Father can be found. Jesus is the One who has seen the Father and He can show the Father to those who are willing to believe in Him.

It is at this point where those words from the Book of Revelation come to my mind, "Look, I am standing at the door, knocking. If one of you hears me calling and opens the door, I will come in to eat with him, and he with me" (Rev. 3,20). Christ eagerly desires to come into our lives and sit at our table.

Our Gospel today ends with the verb "to eat:" "I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world." There are some other important verbs to consider: "to come," "to see," and "to believe." Only the doorway of faith in Christ can guarantee salvation, the access to eternal life with God.

Prophet Elijah was a great man of faith, but as all human beings, fragile and limited, suffered from a crisis of faith. Our first reading today presents Elijah to us as tired, fatigued, sad, and even running away. He feels a crude persecution against his life, and he even believes that God has abandoned him in spite of being faithful to God and risking everything for His glory. In his desperation a terrifying cry is heard, "This is enough, O Lord! Take my life."

We, in the same way as Elijah, can feel tired, frustrated and even in darkness. We feel as if we had lost all meaning in life; and we look back and ask ourselves if all the good we did was of any worth because we can't see the fruits from that behavior; as if between God and us existed a great barrier.

But at no moment at all God abandoned Elijah, God only wanted for his faith to grow and mature even more. God helped him by sending an angel who said to him, "Get up

and eat.” The angel had to insist a second time because Elijah was severely depressed. Finally Elijah, as he could, stood up and ate and “then strengthened by that food, he walked forty days and forty nights to the mountain of God, Horeb (Sinai).”

People kept following Jesus in their search for an answers that could give true meaning to their lives, and Jesus had the answer, but what they did not have was enough faith; because they were listening to His words but could no grasp their meaning: “I am the living bread.” It was difficult for them to accept that Jesus, a man of their race, son of a carpenter named Joseph, could come from heaven. In the same way that God sent manna from heaven to satisfy their hunger in the dessert and later on died, now God satisfies our hunger with His Son, who has the “words of everlasting life,” and whoever eats His living bread will never die.

Many times in our own pilgrimage we encounter exhausting, cloudy, cold, and even frightening days. Yet God, who never abandons us, prepares a meal to strengthen us in our way: Jesus in the Eucharist. So, that by His body and drinking His blood we may “see and believe” in Christ, the door of salvation for everyone, and true meaning to our lives.

Faith implies work and sacrifice. It implies the sacrifice of allowing ourselves to be enlightened by Christ, and the work of deepening our free given faith. Christ’s wish is for our faith to grow and mature in order to produce the expected fruits.

Through this banquet of God’s living Word, Jesus Christ, we are enlightened and guided, we are animated and fortified. And this banquet reaches its fullness once we eat His Body and drink His Blood under the species of bread and wine in the Holy Eucharist.

This Holy Eucharist that we celebrate together is the best way to learn and grow in our faith. How? Allowing Christ, our King and Teacher, to instruct us in our faith, in order “to grow and have life” in Him. Just remember, whoever builds his house on sand, sooner or later it would be destroyed by the ocean waves or the strong wind, but whoever builds his house on a firm rock, Jesus Christ our “cornerstone,” there would be no wind or ocean waves that could tear it down.