

Closing Prayer

God our Father and provider,
whose Son has given his flesh for the life of the world,
sustain your pilgrim Church on its Journey
with the word of life and the bread of heaven.

Draw us nearer to him in whose name we gather,
that, following his way of sacrificial love,
we may come to the banquet of eternal life.
Grant this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever.

Opening prayers · Ordinary Time 19, Year B²

Proper 14

Sunday between 7 and 13 August inclusive
Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Principal Service readings

1 Kings 19.4-8	Elijah journeys to Horeb, fortified by bread from an angel
Psalms 34.1-8	I will bless the Lord at all times
Ephesians 4.25 – 5.2	Reformed behaviour befits the Christian, forgiven through Christ
John 6.35,41-51	Jesus, the bread of life

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

Jesus, the bread of life

³⁵Jesus said to the crowd, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.'

⁴¹Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, 'I am the bread that came down from heaven.' ⁴²They were saying, 'Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, "I have come down from heaven"?' ⁴³Jesus answered them, 'Do not complain among yourselves. ⁴⁴No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day. ⁴⁵It is written in the prophets, "And they shall all be taught by God." Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. ⁴⁶Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. ⁵⁰This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.'

² *Opening prayers : scripture-related collects for the years A, B and C from the sacramentary* / International Commission on English in the Liturgy. – Norwich : Canterbury Press, 1999.

Comments and Questions

Jesus long discourse on the bread of life began at 6.30. By 6.41 the response of some of the crowd has become more hostile (labelled by John as 'the Jews'). Their 'murmuring' (6.43), recalling the behaviour of the Israelites in the wilderness (cf. Exodus 15.24; 16.2; 17.3), indicates rebellion. Jesus' claim to be the bread from heaven (6.35-40), is being challenged. How can he make the claim of coming from heaven, they ask, when we know his father and his mother (6.42). He is a 'local lad'. Moses had warned the murmuring people of Israel, 'Your complaints are not against us, but against the Lord' (Exodus 16.8).

Jesus says, tangentially that those who are drawn by the Father will come to him (6.45). Jesus quotes from Isaiah, 'And they shall all be taught by God' (Isaiah 54.13). He then describes himself as intermediary between God and the people (6.46). He repeats his declaration, 'I am the bread of life' (6.35, 48), and restates it, 'I am the living bread which has come down from heaven' (6.51). After saying this is the food of eternal life, he states further that, 'the bread that I shall give is my flesh, for the life of the world' (6.51).

Jesus contrasts the two breads, the Old Testament manna that the people eat and eventually all died. The Mosaic bread did not produce life and even Moses died. But there is a bread that surpasses the bread given by Moses, which Jesus identifies with himself. Jesus will give his life for the life of the world, but how would Jesus' death provide nourishment for the life of the world? It is a question that is yet to be answered.

Quotations

1

All bread is the bread of heaven, her father used to say. It expresses the will of God to sustain us in this flesh, in this life. Weary or bitter or bewildered as we may be, God is faithful. He lets us wander so we will know what it means to come home."

Home / Marilynne Robinson. 2008

2

I have no taste for the food that perishes nor for the pleasures of this life. I want the Bread of God which is the Flesh of Christ, who was the seed of David; and for drink I desire his Blood which is love that cannot be destroyed.

St Ignatius of Antioch, died c.110

3

The Eucharist is the bread that gives strength... It is at once the most eloquent proof of his love and the most powerful means of fostering his love in us. He gives himself every day so that our hearts as burning coals may set afire the hearts of the faithful.

St. Teresa of Calcutta, 1910–1997

Related topics

For further study:

Eucharist; morality; moral decision making; Jesus Christ, the Bread of Life; conversion; faith; symbol of bread (Easter Vigil, symbol of bread); discipleship

¹ New Revised Standard Version Bible is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.