

The readings for Sunday, August 12, 2018:

1 Kings 19:4-8

Psalm 34:1-8

Taste and see that the LORD is good. (Ps. 34:8)

Ephesians 4:25—5:2

John 6:35, 41-51

We are in the dog days of summer, when it seems so long until we feel Fall's coolness. We may be in a bit of a spiritual funk, as well. I often find August a slow slog, spiritually. We're deep into that long, green season, but so far away from Advent. And now we hit week after week of bread Gospels.

Many of us may be feeling like we're in the dog days of life, whether it be in our jobs, our home lives, or the larger communities in which we live. We feel like once we had a larger vision, a purpose to our being. Now we can't even decide what we want for dinner - it's too hot to cook, eat, and wash up.

The best church communities remind us of our purpose, each and every Sunday. There are weeks that I wish our church offered daily services. Some weeks, it seems like a small eternity until Sunday. Some weeks, I have a vision of a church with a drive-through window, where I could get an emergency Eucharist, some strength for the journey, and maybe a blessing.

Henri Nouwen spent much of his writing talking about Communion, trying to impress upon his readers how important it is. In *Bread for the Journey: A Daybook of Wisdom and Faith*, he says, "The Eucharist is the sacrament by which we become one body. . . . It is becoming the living Lord, visibly present in the world" (reading for Oct. 13). In the reading for the next day, he says, "We who receive the Body of Christ become the living Christ." Nouwen argues for a mystical – yet very real – transformation: the wine and bread transform themselves into blood and body which then transforms us from ordinary sinful human into Christ.

We are hungry for that transformation, but like those people who followed Christ from shore to shore, hoping for a free meal, we often don't know what we hunger for. We want to do God's work in the world, but there's so much work to do, and we're so tired before we even get started.

Our Scriptures remind us in both the Old and New Testaments that God provides. God gives us both physical food and spiritual food. But we must be receptive. We must open our mouths. God won't chew for us.

It's good to return to the metaphor of bread. It's good to think about small granules of yeast and to remember that without their activation, our dough would not be worth baking. It's good to know that small acts can lead to great transformation further on.

It's essential to remember that we are the leaven in this loaf that is the world. In the words of N. T. Wright: "But what we can and must do in the present, if we are obedient to the gospel, if we are following Jesus, and if we are indwelt, energized, and directed by the Spirit, is to build for the kingdom. This brings us back to 1 Corinthians 15:58 once more: what you do in the Lord is not in

vain. You are not oiling the wheels of a machine that's about to roll over a cliff. You are not restoring a great painting that's shortly going to be thrown on the fire" (*Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, page 208).

We return to church to participate in the sacrament. Then, fortified, we can do the work of the week before returning again to the sacraments of Sunday.