

Commentary for the 19th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Why Murmur?



The word for today is onomatopoeia.

Onomatopoeia is the name of those words that imitate the sound they are referring to, like fizz, and crackle and hiss, and murmur. Murmur is the word we hear today in the Gospel and which we heard many times in the Old Testament account of the Exodus of the Hebrews from Egypt. Those people were really great murmurers, or horrible ones depending on your point of view. God delivered them from the slavery of Egypt through the miracles performed by Moses and the people murmured that they would be caught by Pharaoh's troops and die in the desert. After God saved them by parting the Red Sea, they murmured that there would not be enough food for them to eat in the desert. After God gave them manna, they murmured that the food was boring and wanted better grub. Literally speaking, they may have been on to something here because manna was probably a byproduct of desert insects.

In today's reading from the Sixth chapter of the Gospel of John, Jesus tells the people that He is the Bread that has come down from heaven. And what do they do? They murmur. "Who does he think he is? Is this not Jesus the son of Joseph? Don't we know his father and mother?" They would rather complain instead of listen to what he has to say.

Jesus is telling them that they have nothing to complain about. He is the One the world has been waiting for. He is the One whose gaze has been turned towards the Father for all eternity. He is the only One who has seen the Father. He is the only One who can give eternal life to those who believe. Instead of complain, the people should realize that they are living at the center of human history. All of God's revelation led up to Christ, the One who himself is God's revelation. All of history, past,

present and future, takes its meaning from Christ. Life without Christ is meaningless. A life with the Lord is a life worth living. Jesus is offering this life when He says "I am the bread of life," but the people, at least many of them, would rather grumble.

In some ways, perhaps in many ways, we act the same like those ancient Israelites. We murmur. We grumble. Perhaps we grumble over our jobs, our neighbors, or about far more important aspects of our lives, your children, your spouses, our relatives. If we grumble enough, we will see negativity everywhere, including the Church or even, like the ancient Israelites, in God.

It is easy to be negative. It is also an infectious disease. This disease is particularly contagious down here in Florida where hardening of the arteries is a state sport, and the two old men on the muppets set the guidelines for holding discussion. One negative thought leads to another. One negative person easily infects another.

We forget that we have been gifted with the Eternal Positive. The eternal Word has become one of us. He who for all eternity is in intimate union with divinity, shares His life with us. St. Paul could have had plenty of reason to grumble. He was mocked, insulted, scourged, beaten, etc. But he writes in Romans 8:18: "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the glory to be revealed for us."

We, the people of the promise, the people of God's choice, have to fight the contagion of negativity. St. Paul speaks about the necessity for a positive attitude to the Christians at Corinth in 2 Corinthians 1:19: "For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, whom we proclaimed among you, was not 'Yes and No;' but in Him it is always 'Yes.' ' For in him every one of God's promises is a "Yes."

"But Father," people may say, "you must admit that life has tremendous difficulties, especially at this time when so many of us are unemployed." Or, "Father, you obviously have no idea what I have experienced. My family has put the fun in dysfunctional. My friends think I'm weird. And my feet hurt." Yes, this is true. None of us could ever experience anything the same as another person. But let me say this, I have seen people, you people, endure the worst tragedies and still cling to your Christian optimism. I have witnessed the worst, parents losing their children, suffering in ways that cannot be imagined, and yet still keep an optimistic attitude in life. I have seen you folks at your very best when the circumstances of life could have easily thrust you into negativity.

How do you do it? How do you hold on to your Christian optimism through tragedy? How have you avoided the contagion of negativity? You must have a special help, a special gift, a special grace. You must have received the food you have needed for the journey of life.

Enter Elijah in 1 Kings 19, our first reading. He was at the end of his patience. He has had it. He was being hunted by Queen Jezebel's men. He tried to walk across the desert, but he was tired, parched, hungry. He found a broom tree, a tree with big leaves, so he sat in its shade, and begged God to let him die. God had other plans. He sent an angel who gave Elijah food and water. Fed by an angel, Elijah traveled forty days and nights to the Mountain of God Horeb.

We have been given a greater food than Elijah had. Fed by Jesus Christ, with the food that is Jesus Christ, we have walked through a valley of tears that is one aspect of the human condition. We have

kept our eyes focused on our goal, the eternal joy of the Lord. The communion we receive, the life of Christ that nourishes us, gives us the ability to look beyond the present and see all in the context of the Gift Who is Jesus Christ.

For in the time before Christ there was no one who ever received the gift we routinely take within ourselves every Sunday when we come to communion. In the Gospel Jesus says, "Your ancestors ate manna in the desert, but they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, for a man to eat and never die. I myself am the living bread come down from heaven. If anyone eats this bread he shall live forever; the bread I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world."

We come to Church, we receive Communion, not because of a Church rule but because our journey through life is difficult, but the goal of the journey is wonderful, eternal union with God. We receive communion because we need food for this journey. The Lord gives us this food. He is our food. He is the bread of life.

Sure, life has challenges, huge challenges. All of us will be confronted with pain, fear and suffering if we are not confronted with those reminders of our humanity right now. But we have no reason to murmur, no reason to grumble, no reason to complain, no reason to be negative. There is a simple reason for our optimism. We belong to Jesus Christ.

And He is ours.

<http://www.st.ignatius.net/pastor.html>

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