

***BREAD THAT CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN***

**19<sup>TH</sup> Sunday OT**

**Year B**

**by Dcn. Tom McConnell**

**1Kgs 19:4-8; Ps 34:2-9; Eph 4:30-5:2; Jn 6:41-51**

**A community of nuns in Paris usually has a priest come in every evening at 4:00pm to celebrate the Eucharist with them. One day the priest fell suddenly ill and asked a visiting African priest to help him out. The African priest showed up at the convent at about 5 minutes 'til 4 and rang the doorbell. Following the prevailing custom in Paris at the time, he was dressed in casual and not in clerics. A nun quickly answered the door thinking that their priest had arrived. She was taken aback when she saw an African face and without giving the visitor a chance to say why he came, she quickly dismissed him thinking that he had come to ask for help. *“Sorry we cannot help you,”* said the nun. *“We are having Mass now. Come back some other time.”***

***“Thank you, Sister!”* said the priest. And he turned back and left. A few minutes later, phones were ringing in the rectory. It was the nuns. They said they were still waiting for the priest! You can imagine their embarrassment when they learned that he had come but they had sent him away.**

**Why did these holy nuns miss the celebration of the Eucharist they were waiting for? No, it was not because they were bad people. It was simply because the priest that came to them did not look like the priest they were expecting to come. The reality before them differed from their expectations and they didn't recognize the moment of their visitation. I suggest, dear friends, that this is precisely the problem the Galileans in today's Gospel had with Jesus.**

**The opening and closing verses of today's Gospel reading speak of "*the bread that came down from heaven.*" This could as well be the theme of the Gospel. And it holds the key to the understanding of what is going on in the story. You see, the people expected the Messiah to, literally, come down from heaven. They were waiting for spectacular events and supernatural manifestations in the sky when they would literally see the Anointed of God coming down in the clouds. So, when Jesus simply came forward and claimed that "*I am He,*" (John 8:24,28) they could not reconcile the reality before them with the expectations in their minds.**

**Jesus, they knew all too well, or at least so they thought. They knew when and where and how he came...from Mary and Joseph as we read: “*Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, ‘I am the bread that came down from heaven.’ They 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?’*” (John 6:41-42). As the controversy deepens, they become even more explicit, later in Chapter 7, saying: “*Yet we know where this man is from; but when the Messiah comes, no one will know where he is from.*”**

**We can see, therefore, that the problem the Jews of Jesus’ time had with the idea of flesh becoming bread was basically an extension of the problem they had with the idea of the word becoming flesh. If we can relate to the mystery of God’s love for us, which prompted the almighty and eternal God to become an ordinary, mortal Man like we are, then we are more likely to relate with the mystery of this Man becoming bread, again as an act of love for us. But if we insist**

that God must meet our expectations and our reasoning before we can believe, then we're in for a big surprise.

How does God come down from heaven? How does God come into our lives? Today's Gospel shows us that God comes to us in the ordinary people we meet in our everyday lives.

The question is not whether God comes to us or not, but whether we are able to recognize God at work in our lives.

Today let us take a second look at those persons we only know too well—or at least we think we do—those people we often take for granted. These men, women and children may indeed be the messengers that God, in His providence, has sent to us to educate and prepare us for eternal life. Let us not fail to recognize God in those people we encounter...and let us act accordingly.

Last month I received in the mail, anonymously, a “Thank You” note for the impact my homily on “The Trouble Tree” had on a person's family. I was moved to tears, especially when I realized what I say from the pulpit can affect many people in many ways. But we are all homilists...every

**one of you preach hundreds of homilies to people every day, in your words and in your actions. How you treat and are perceived by people, including your family, can impact their lives immensely. That's precisely why we all must see God in every person we encounter each and every day...and why we must act accordingly.**

**God bless you all!!**