

19th Sunday per Annum - B
I Kings 19:4-8;
Ephesians 4:30-5:2;
John 6:41-51
Little Flower - 8/8/21

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today's Gospel continuation of Jesus' Bread of Life Discourse begins to focus on the Eucharist.

What distinguishes the Catholic Church as Catholic is that we are a sacramental church. At the time of the Reformation, most non-Catholic Christian churches jettisoned the sacraments and became largely churches of the word while we remained a sacramental church. In his book *The Catholic Imagination*, Fr. Andrew Greeley wrote, "The special Catholic imagination can appropriately be called sacramental. It sees created reality as a 'sacrament,' that is, a revelation of the presence of God." In other words, the principle of sacramentality is that all of reality is a sign of God's presence, power, and activity.

This principle is exemplified in the Book of Psalms: "*The heavens proclaim the glory of God, and the firmament announces the works of his hands*" [19:1]. Likewise, according to Genesis, God created us in his own image and likeness. On the other hand, Jesus told those who followed him after the multiplication of the loaves and fish that they lacked a sacramental imagination: "*Amen, amen, I say to you, you are looking for me not because you saw signs but because you ate the loaves and were filled*" [Jn. 6:26]. In other words, they did not see with eyes of faith.

Our traditional definition of sacrament is "an outward sign, instituted by Christ, to give grace." In the strict sense, the word *sacrament* applies to the seven sacraments of the Church. However, in the broad sense, we can apply the word *sacrament* to Christ and the Church. We believe that Christ is the sacrament of God. As St. John wrote, "*What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we looked upon and touched with our hands concerns the Word of life*" [I Jn. 1:1]. In other words, those who heard Jesus were hearing the human words of God. Those who saw him were seeing God in human form. Those who touched him were touching God.

The Church is the sacrament of Jesus. Jesus came into the world to bring God's presence, love, and mercy to all people. However, Jesus lived at one time in one place. Therefore, he established the Church to be the sacrament of his presence. In Matthew's Gospel, for example, Jesus said, "*For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them*" [18:20]. Both as individuals and as a community, we are called to be sacraments of Jesus. In his Letter to the Ephesians, Paul wrote, "*So be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love as Christ loved us and handed himself over for us....*" In other words, Paul calls us to be sacraments of God and of Christ by making our own and living the qualities of God in dealing with us, qualities such as integrity, justice, tenderness, and love, and by being self-revealing, self-giving, and self-sacrificing as Jesus was.

My brothers and sisters, we believe that Jesus himself instituted the seven sacraments of the Church. The seven sacraments correspond to critical needs or moments in the life of the individual and the community. They mediate Jesus' presence, power, and activity through sacramental signs. To understand the importance of the seven sacraments, we only need to reflect on our personal relationships. Personal relationships always take place on two levels. For example, couples live their love, their relationship, in everything they do with and for one another. However, for their relationship to thrive and develop, they also need to celebrate their relationship. These celebrations are the privileged times when couples are explicitly conscious of their love for each other, of their relationship with each other. Although we encounter Jesus in everyday life, we also need to celebrate, ratify, and seal our relationship with Jesus in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist in which we offer ourselves through, with, and in Christ to God the Father almighty and, in return, receive Christ's body and blood.