

19th Sunday in Ordinary Time - August 9, 2015

Reading 1: 1 Kgs 19:4-8

Reading 2: Eph 4:30—5:2

Gospel: Jn 6:41-51

Homily

By: Fr. Thomas McNally

There are few things on God's good earth that I imagine we more take for granted than the calendar hanging on our wall at home. You don't see our politicians in the primary debates arguing over what day of the week it is- though, God help us, it might be more intelligible than some of the political doublespeak we here from our politicians. You don't see movements on social media pushing for a reform in the number of days in the year; there's no #EndLeapYears or #DecemberMustGo. And nobody fights for their civil rights to write "2018" on all their checks... as interesting as that could be for our banks. We take what we have for granted. But that wasn't always the case.

Rewind 434 years and six months- Pope Gregory XIII did something that shook the world. He didn't write an encyclical; he didn't host a Church Council. He didn't invent sliced bread... Pope Gregory invented a calendar. The calendar that the vast majority of the world uses, which marks today as August 9th in the year of the Lord 2015, was invented by our 226th Pope (give or take). So if anyone ever tells you Catholics are anti-science, just feel free to ask them which institution it was again that promulgated the most scientifically-accurate, commonly used calendar in the history of the world. And then feel free to tell them to sit down and shut their mouth. And just as Pope Gregory retained the concept of the leap year in his calendar, whether you like it or not, he also retained the concept of a seven day week. And not everyone in the history of the world has been a fan, because while the definition of a year is scientific, and the definition of a month is somewhat scientific- it once was thought to approximate the lunar cycles- the definition of a week... is thoroughly religious. Genesis tells us that God made the world in six days and on the seventh day He rested. Our work week is based on God's word.

I'm surprised the same groups that desire "In God We Trust" to be removed from our currency haven't pushed for a change in our calendar. But it wouldn't be the first time... or the second, for that matter. Both France after their revolution and Soviet Russia decided to do away with the seven day week, because it "chained people to an idea of God". France went to a 10-day week; Russia tried a five, then a six day week. You can obviously tell from the nature of their calendars today that those efforts failed spectacularly. But at least in Russia, they quickly realized it *wasn't* working. First they realized you couldn't work people forever- we needed a day of rest. So they tried to give each worker one day off, but heaven forbid it be the same day since that would look too much like Sunday, so they gave each citizen a random day off. The problem being, families never had time together because their days off never lined up. Families fell apart. And, what was perhaps more of a concern for the Soviets, the machinery fell apart, because not even our inanimate objects are made to run continuously forever. Even they need downtime for repair and renovation. Then they tried a six day week and gave everyone the same day off, but it didn't help things much. Finally, they scrapped the whole thing and returned to our calendar- the *Catholic* calendar.

Because our work week is based on God's word. But lest we forget, so are we. Our faith in God isn't a fairy tale; it's what's at the heart of all of reality. And God didn't rest on the seventh day because He needed it- the All-powerful God didn't tucker Himself out making the Universe. He rested on the seventh day to leave us an example- not because He needed it but because we do. And we don't have to have lived through Soviet Russia to see the damage it does to us when we don't live that. Many of us have probably seen it at one time or another. Having to put in a couple 80-hour work weeks before a big presentation at the office or during residency at the hospital; getting 9 hours of sleep over five days during exam week in college to make up for all the studying we should have been doing the last sixteen weeks. *Not that I would know what that feels like* It burns us out. We wind up a little like poor Elijah in our first reading, collapsing under a tree and telling God to take us now. And Sunday is God's gift to us to help us to stay strong and to stay sane. I talked a little about the importance of Sunday rest last week. But now our first reading shows us another dimension of Sunday rest.

What does God do in reply to Elijah? He doesn't ask Elijah to take a 13-hour nap, as much as Elijah might have liked that. He doesn't tell him to spend a day at the spa. He presents him with bread to have strength for the journey. Which doesn't seem like a big deal until we read that in light of our Gospel today. *Jesus Christ* is our bread for the journey. *He* is the one God the Father has given to us so that we can keep going. Sunday as a day of rest is hugely important for us and we need to reclaim that concept as a culture. But Sunday as a day of the Eucharist *is even more important*. Because, lest we forget, grace matters. God actually works in our lives and in the sacraments. If we're open to the grace God desires to give us, He will help us through the trials of the week in what we receive here today. It's easy to lose sight of that. We can come here so often, whether it's once a week or upwards of three times a day for me, that we lose sight of the fact that God is truly feeding us in the Eucharist. And there is some place in each of our lives where God desires to give us strength- there is not one exception in this congregation. Whether it's growth in hope in the midst of medical problems, growth in courage in the face of slander or people talking behind our backs at school, growth in motivation in the face of anxiety or an overwhelming work load- God intends to see us through to next Sunday.

I don't honestly know how people do it. I don't know where I would be without Him. When I meet people in the hospital or see old friends suffering without Christ, I wonder how much heavier that burden must be! Through the ups and downs of life, I recognize my own need for Jesus Christ to stay strong. Now that He and I see each other as often as we do, what with my being a priest and all, when I'm sick and unable to celebrate Mass or receive communion for a day or two, there's an ache in my heart. That next Mass is like seeing an old friend again. I had a friend in seminary comment that it was weird for him even to go to Mass too late at night, because the whole day it felt like there was something missing.

Because Christ is our daily bread. When we pray that line in the Our Father in ten or fifteen minutes- "give us this day our daily bread"- we're praying for a lot of things, but let's not forget we're praying especially for Him. Because just as Pope Gregory made sure our calendars contain a place set aside for resting in God, so, too, do our hearts. It's why we're supposed to take a moment of quiet prayer after communion before the final prayer; it's not there to annoy people, I promise! It's supposed to be there to give us all- you and me alike- a chance to remember why we're here and find Christ's rest.

Because sometimes it takes a moment of silence to remember that this moment is special. Even if we take our calendars for granted, may we never do that to Him.