

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, the readings over the last 2 Sundays have really stressed the importance of spiritual food over earthly food, spiritual wealth over material wealth. That was the point of Jesus feeding the 5000 — **"Do not work for food that spoils, he said, but for food that lasts to eternal life."** And today he declared in our Gospel reading, **"I am the bread of life."**

In the reading before us, however, we are shown that earthly food and material wealth do have a place in our lives as Christians. They serve a purpose. We see that they give us the opportunity and a reason to serve our God.

Our text picks up just after Elijah's victory over King Ahab and the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel. While it was a victory for the Lord and for God's people, for Elijah, it didn't seem to change anything for the better. Ahab went and told evil Queen Jezebel **"everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets of Baal with the sword."** Now Elijah had an even bigger target on his head. And so he ran for his life. **"I've had enough, LORD. Take my life, for I am no better than my fathers."** Even after all he had accomplished against the prophets of Baal, just like every prophet who'd come before him, his life was constantly being threatened. And so he curled up under the broom tree thinking, "Why wait for the inevitable. Take me now, Lord."

Suddenly an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." Perhaps we would have expected the angel of the Lord to do the whole thing where he showed Elijah a great and powerful wind, but the Lord was not in the wind. And then an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. And then the fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And finally the gentle whisper...a spiritual lesson right then and there on who the true God is and how he operates, that no matter what, Elijah could trust him and be joyful about the 7000 in Israel who had not bowed down to Baal, but were standing shoulder to shoulder with him, with Elijah.

But not yet. That was coming, first it was, **"Get up and eat."** **"Then he looked around, and near his head there was a loaf of bread baking on coals and a jar of water, so he ate and drank, and then he lay down again."**

"Then the angel of the LORD came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, because the journey is too much for you."

⁸So he got up and ate and drank.

Finally it seems there was something in it for Elijah, right? Would we be surprised if that was his attitude? "Now I'm getting something out of this — a free meal." Finally his faith was starting to pay off.

I don't think we would be too surprised because Elijah had the same sinful flesh that we do. That sinful flesh that says, "God owes *me*, because I follow him." The attitude that all we have and all we are able to do is somehow payment for our devotion, like some big loyalty program we were all keen to be a part of, unlike the rest of the world. And when we see the rest of the world prospering even while living how they do, maybe at times we feel like Elijah did, maybe not ready to die, but at least to try something new when it comes to God's Word in our lives, or at least to ask God, "Hey, what gives?"

Living in this world it's easy to start seeing material wealth that way — whether it's wealth or health, or fulfillment or satisfaction — as something God gives us to enjoy simply to pass the time here on earth, to help us fit in with the rest of world, and that's it. In our sinfulness we take the very true teaching of spiritual wealth being vastly more important than earthly wealth to its extreme, so that in our minds the two have nothing to do with each other — we can use them as *we* please, as selfishly as we want.

But here God shows us that they do go together. Material Wealth does serve a purpose — it gives opportunity to serve God. It gives us the strength and physical power to put our faith into action, to make use of God's greater spiritual gifts.

⁸So [Elijah] got up and ate and drank. Then, with the strength gained from that food he walked for forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mountain of God. God gave him that food — that food that spoils we could say — to strengthen him, so that he could get up from under that broom tree, to get up from his momentary depression and feelings of "woe is me," and to continue his life of service to God. That's what Elijah did. That's the attitude he had.

The fact that God didn't just show his power and reveal his plan right then and there, gives us pause. It gives us the opportunity to stop and ask the question in *our* lives, "How can I use what God has blessed me with to serve him?" If I look at all that I have and about each thing ask the

question, “How can I serve God with this?” what does that look like? How does that change our attitude when it comes to material wealth?

Suddenly it’s not all about me and this life, but how I can use the things of this life to serve my God as I look forward to eternal life. For example, a Christian home isn’t just a roof over our heads, but a place God has provided where we can go and escape the world around us, a fortress away from the evil that is constantly out to get us. A shelter where husbands strive to love their wives as Christ loved the Church, and where wives strive to submit to their husbands as to the Lord, where both submit to each other out of reverence for Christ. A place where moms and dads, grandmas and grandpas, aunts and uncles strive to raise their children in the training and instruction of the Lord. A house is a material blessing, yes, but one that gives us countless opportunities to serve our God.

When we take into account all that God has blessed each of us with, we could stay here for hours talking about all the different opportunities each one of those blessings gives us to serve our God.

But instead of taking the time here to do that, there’s another, more important way that material blessings are connected to spiritual blessings. St. Augustine taught it this way: *“There is nothing visible or transitory that does not point us back to something more important that is invisible and imperishable.”* In other words, as much and as greatly as God has blessed each of us with all that we need for this life, with clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, the material blessings of our God, however great or greater he has chosen to bless us with these things, they stand as a reminder how God has blessed us infinitely more with spiritual blessings.

As each of us looks at ourselves we should see ourselves covered with sin, from head to toe. Sins of selfishness and greed, sins of what’s in it for me. The sins of not taking the opportunities afforded by material blessings to serve our God and live out our faith. Sins of every kind. And we might ask, “Whats the use of serving our God when we are filled with so much failure?

When you get dirty, what do you do? You wash up, put on new clothes. When we, in faith, look at ourselves, when we, in faith in Jesus, look into the mirror of God’s law, it’s all gone. Instead of the ripped and torn, stained and soiled rags of our sinful flesh, we have a beautiful robe of

Jesus’ righteousness. A robe of righteousness, purchased and won by the blood of God’s one and only Son, who by his life, death, and resurrection has taken all our sins away. All our stains, all our failures, in Christ, you are forgiven. You have clothes in your closet. You have a robe of righteousness in Christ.

This world can leave us pretty hungry. the things that we see, the things that we have to deal with, day after day, it all can leave us feeling so empty, wondering, what’s the use? What use is it striving to serve our God in this world, in this society, in this community?

When you are hungry, what do you do? You eat. You go to your pantry, your fridge and you eat until you are full again.

Jesus, the bread of life is here to fill us up when this world reveals how empty we are on our own. The Gospel, the good news of our Savior, of forgiveness, full and free for all our sins reminds us who we are serving and why we are serving him — a loving God who gave up his Son for us. Jesus, the bread of life strengthens us in the promises of God to persevere. To share this bread with others, the very world, society, community that makes it so hard. You have food on your tables at home. You have food for your souls here in God’s Word, here at the Lord’s table.

Confucius says that a man who is done working on his house is dead. As a fairly new home owner who has already had a list of repairs, I don’t laugh so hard at that anymore! Whether the place that you live needs a little work or is your perfect refuge from the world, it serves as a reminder of the home waiting for you in heaven. It’s complete. It’s ready. It’s perfect, it is free of sin. It’s yours not by your work, by the work and promise of your Savior, Jesus.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, until we are called by the Lord to our heavenly home, this is where we live — in a world, full of worldly things. **Do not work for food that spoils.** But don’t dismiss it outright either. See them for what they are. Blessings from our God to enjoy, yes. But don’t stop there. See in them the opportunity and a reason, a whole list of reasons, to praise and thank him, to live for him, to serve him, now and forever, amen!