

One wonderful experience of my life was a pilgrimage 13 years ago to Mount Athos. Holy Mountain, as Greek Orthodox call it, is a 27 mile long, 3 mile wide peninsula sticking out into the Aegean Sea that has been considered the garden of the Virgin Mary for over a thousand years. An ancient wall separates the peninsula from the rest of the world, and the population is male monks and monks in training. They live in one of the 20 or so ancient monasteries, or in huts or ancient caves as hermits, or in the lone tiny village called Karies. Their life is complete prayer and contemplation ... and the physical work necessary to live a very simple life.

Unlike our Vatican City, Holy Mountain is not a place for tourists. It's for pilgrims only, male, and you must have written permission to visit ... and part of the holiness of the place is ... you have to beg. When you're hungry, you ask monks for food. At night time ... you beg a place to sleep. It was weird and embarrassing ... although the monks were usually kind ... but I understand the point.

Most of the time, most people (including me!) consider our life our own accomplishment. Who we are and what we have --- we've earned these things. To rely on someone else's goodness for a necessity reminds us that life's profound essentials all come from God and they are God's gifts to us ... not the products of our effort and labor. They are graces, that should make us grateful, and humble and reverent ... not prideful and presumptuous.

In the first reading today, Elijah is so stressed, exhausted and discouraged he just wants to die. "This is enough, O Lord" he says. "Take my life." But God sends an angel with bread and water. "Get up and eat, else the journey will be too long for you." God is like that ... gives us bread to stave off the depression, grief, anxiety and keep us going --- bread we could never purchase ourselves.

I asked people this last week if they'd ever been so tired or discouraged they wished they'd just die, and if God had given them bread to keep them going. The answer was, over and over, yes and yes. Listen to some: "I was just stuck, depressed, the wind knocked out of me. I would like to have died. Then a chance visit with a dear friend put my feet back on the ground again. " "I was in charge of this project, and the day it was on, absolutely no one came to help me. I was about ready to cry, when from nowhere, out of heaven, came 5 or 6 people to make everything a big success." "My husband is living bread for me. I don't deserve his love and affection." A telephone call that came out of nowhere. My vocation in life. A feeling of serenity that came over me, from nowhere, when I thought I'd reached the end of my rope.

God does send living bread. Count on it. And then there's Jesus Christ. Not just a bread of life, but *the* bread of life, sent down from heaven directly by God to you. So that you'll rise and not die. His words are bread, his attitude is bread, his very flesh is bread.

Don't be fooled. Don't think just because a generous God has made this bread so available that your relationship with Jesus isn't the most precious thing in the world. What's more precious - diamonds or glass? If you're not this aware person, you'll say diamonds. They're more rare; they cost more. But you can get along without diamonds

much easier than you can get along without spectacles and glassware and windows.
Glass is way more valuable than diamonds.

And Jesus Christ, the bread of life we receive at Mass, is more precious than anything imaginable. If you don't know this now, perhaps you'll know later ... when you're as spent or exhausted or disgusted as Elijah ... ready to die maybe ... and God comes with a smile and lays Jesus in your heart like a hearth cake and a jug of living water.