



My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

With the coming of my last weekend in the parish, there is much sorrow and tears, but also hope for the future. I always saw this day as sometime "in the not too distant future" ... and now it is here. Being a priest means that I belong to everyone... and to no one but God alone. To be a good priest, I have to give my heart away, and also to be willing to have that heart broken over and over again. It would be easy to harden myself and say I won't do it again... but that would make me distant, aloof, working a job, not being a father. And so, I have to have my heart broken as I say goodbye to yet another family.

Yet, I belong to God and God is faithful. I have spoken about the Hebrew word "Ḥesed" (see Psalm 136) which means zeal for covenant fidelity – that God is not just faithful to His covenant, but He is so full of zeal, of fire, for the covenant that He "can't help Himself" so to speak. And I know that He is faithful to me and to you, and so I can trust as I leave that He is taking care of you and me. This gives me hope and joy, but it doesn't stop the tears! And that's ok, since even Jesus wept at the death of His friend Lazarus, knowing full well that He was going to raise Him up. We are experiencing a true loss and grieving is appropriate... even as we have great trust and hope in God.

As we continue through the Bread of Life Discourse in John, we are brought deeper into the mystery of the Eucharist. There are many different names for the Eucharist. One of the names is "food for the journey." What is the journey? It is the journey to God. Most often, it is used in reference to our final journey as we pass from this life to the next, but it is what is needed to strengthen us. We see this in the first reading as the story with Elijah prefigures the Eucharist. At first, the food given by the angel did not seem to energize Elijah (he lay down again), but when put to the test, it gave Him the strength He needed for the journey... walking 40 days and 40 nights to Mount Horeb (Sinai).

As we continue our journey of life following the Lord, we are invited to run to the Eucharist, the food for the journey, so that we can be strengthened for the impossible road ahead. There are many mountains we must climb, but with Jesus, we will be strengthened. He will help us to trust in the difficult moments of grieving and saying goodbye. He will help us to know He is with us through the pains and struggles of life. He will show us His healing love through the sicknesses and injuries... and He has been known to heal us. He is faithful to us. He is zealously faithful to us. When He made the new covenant with us in His Blood, He made us blood with Him, made us family. This covenant bond He will never break, even if we are unfaithful. But stay close to the Eucharist, so He can strengthen you!

I end my last article with a tearful farewell, and I say to you:

May the road rise up to meet you.
May the wind be always at your back.
May the sun shine warm upon your face,
the rains fall soft upon your fields,
and, until we meet again,
may God hold you in the palm of his hand.

Your brother and Father,

Fr. Von