

9.8.76
16.8.79 (689)

Slavia (flour of St Francis) "Elijah went on into the wilderness, a day's journey, and sitting under a fig tree wished he were dead. 'Lord' he said 'I have had enough. Take my life: I am no better than my ancestors'. Then he lay down and went to sleep." That's the beginning of an episode from Elijah's life that was read ^{last Sunday} yesterday as the first of the scripture readings at Mass in Catholic churches around the world. The full story of what had happened to him to make him so despondent and fed-up, and of what God wanted him to do later, you'll find in the O.T. 1st Bk. of Kings — Elijah was spirit for his life: he'd lost courage. His despairing action and prayer is understandable, the kind of thing it's easy to sympathise with if you've ever felt something of the frustration & insecurity he must have experienced just at that time. His desperation and discouragement was over his service of God, and his behaviour as God's messenger & prophet. Perhaps most of the time, when we feel like giving up, it's over with much less important: or we're just tired and need a rest. Well, Elijah didn't have his rest, in the wilderness, and also food and strength from God so that he was able to get up and continue his journey to Horeb, the place where God was waiting for him to come. That food and strength the Bible says he was given by an angel of the Lord has been seen (from the New Testament viewpoint) as a figure or parable of Christ. His presence and His Eucharist, the Bread of Life. For Christ is hope, strength, courage for those who know that oneself alone, life, the world, are not enough to explain themselves or to fill the deep aspirations of the human heart. Christians are no more incurable optimists (generally)

than the rest of their followers are — though maybe they should be less incurable pessimists, much as those might seem to be pessimistic about, to have had enough, as Elijah said. But when the great saints, from St Paul onwards, prayed and longed to be gone from this present world, it was not for pessimism or to escape, and they didn't lie down to sleep under a private fig tree in some desert of their own. Giving one's life to the service of God and mankind can of course have its human frustrations and fears: the cross of Christ is not absent from the world, though, and He is the Way and Life. 'Giving one's life' is a very aptly ambiguous phrase, maybe specially for a Christian, who remembers that Christ gave his life too for mankind, and still gives us his life. There seem to be so many people these days who take other's lives without a qualm, or the revenge, retribut, threaten, ruin, compel, in the names of all sorts of new gods. But God doesn't take life away from anyone: and Christ told his disciples not to be afraid of those who can only kill the body. One man who took that very much to heart was a saint whose 'day' ^{was the other day, on the 10th} (is tomorrow 10th August) laureate the martyr. He didn't lose courage or become despondent. He's best known, I suppose, for the cheeky comment the story tells he made while being burnt alive on a gridiron: "it's well done: turn it over and eat it" — a far cry from the gloom of Elijah wanting to die. Our lives are in God's hands, as well as those of tyrants, and of ourselves. Think a pray awhile now, listening to a hymn of the Eucharist 'Pange Mysterium' by Cesar Franck

MUSIC = PRAYERS [From a sermon of St Augustine on the feast of St Lawrence [Brev. 10th Aug]]

RHK
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