

18th Sunday in Ordinary Time

When I graduated from high school, I already felt a strong calling from God to become a priest. Our diocese had a high school seminary in those days, so I had spent four years with a number of other guys thinking about priesthood too. When it was time to apply for college, there weren't many options. I had visited Conception Abbey a couple of times, and I wasn't very impressed, so I was hoping the bishop would want me to go to a different seminary for college. He didn't. He wanted me to go to Conception. The day I got the news, I felt empty and disappointed. I was convinced that the next four years were going to be the most boring time of my entire life. Others told me it wouldn't be so bad, but I was convinced it would be awful.

I didn't own a car, so my parents drove me to Conception, and we had car trouble along the way. The car broke down on I-29 near the area where Kansas City International Airport was still under construction. A relative of one of my classmates from St. Joseph, Missouri, had to drive out and find us on the highway to get me to the seminary for my first day of school. I thought things would only get worse.

When we arrived, though, two older students from Oklahoma and New Jersey met us at the car and greeted me with the warmest welcome I had ever experienced. From then on, my four years at Conception Seminary were some of the happiest in my life. They continue to influence me as a Catholic and a priest. I was completely wrong about what I needed; but God knew what to give me.

When Moses led the Israelites out of slavery and through the waters of the Red Sea, the people felt a strong calling from God. They took this journey because God promised that it would bring happiness. But along the way, things broke down. They got hungry in the desert. They thought about all the great food they were able to eat in Egypt. Forgetting about the awful slavery they endured, they complained to Moses and Aaron about life in the desert. Moses told God about the situation, and God gave the people food. They captured wild quail in the evenings, and in the mornings they found an edible substance on certain plants. They called it "manna" which roughly translates the ungrateful expression, "What's this?" It was something to eat, but it still wasn't as good as the food they left behind. They probably thought it was the worst thing possible. But with this bread from heaven, God sustained them all the way to the promised land. They were wrong about what they needed. God knew what to give them.

My brothers and sisters, we receive bread from heaven in the eucharist. It may not seem like much. At times we may go somewhere else and get bad nourishment: We hang with the wrong people. We engage in immoral activities. We waste too much time. God constantly offers us the food we need, but at times we want something else. Even when we get what God provides, we may complain. We think we know better. But sometimes we get what we didn't want, and it turns out to be the best thing ever. God knows what to give us. If we follow the call of God, we will receive the food we need.