

In our first reading from I Kings 19:4-8 we hear of the Prophet Elijah being visited by an angel under a broom tree. That struck me because the Retreat Center where I did my 30-day retreat was called Broom Tree Retreat Center based on this scripture passage. At the beginning of that retreat, the evening before we were to begin our thirty-day silence, I was at a table eating dinner with several people, among whom was a nun of Mother Teresa's Order, the Missionaries of Charity. Sr. Rosalie, when asked, told us her conversion story.

Sr. Rosalie grew up as a nominal Protestant on a ranch in Wyoming, but she didn't really go to church too much. When she headed off to the University of Wyoming as a student she felt a call to explore all religions and the big questions in life. She had met a group of young adults at the Catholic Newman Center. She wondered why they were so joyful. She was attracted to them, but she wasn't interested in Catholicism. It was too ritualistic and strange. But she did go to all the other churches in town – Lutheran, Baptist, Jehovah

Witness, the Mormon, etc. Then one day a girl in the dorm room next to hers asked if she wanted to go to mass. Sister's first reaction was, "No, not really." But then she thought to herself, "I've done everything else. Why not go?" So she went.

It was a strange experience, just as she imagined – but interesting. And when people started going up for communion Rosalie asked her friend what was happening. Her friend said, "We're going to receive the Eucharist." "What's that?" The friend looked at her intently and said, "The Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ Himself!" Rosalie responded out loud and shocked, "You can't really believe that!?" They got into a theological argument right there in the pew. Finally, Rosalie asked if she could receive the Eucharist and her friend said, "No, you have to believe that the Eucharist is the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus Christ as Catholics do."

Well! Hurt and challenged, when Rosalie got home after mass she got out her Bible. She didn't know much about Christianity, but her

occasional visits to churches in her early years had left her with a respect for the Bible. She would see about this Eucharist thing! Sr. Rosalie said, it was funny, the very first passage she turned to was what we just heard today from John 6. "I am the bread come down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world."

Stunned, this changed her world. Shortly thereafter she went to the priest at the Newman Center and asked how she could receive this flesh of Christ, His Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity. After being received into the Church and a mission trip to South America, and several other steps she entered the Missionaries of Charity and for the last 20 years has worn their distinctive blue and white habit.

For my homily I just want to make a couple points. First, notice what first attracted Rosalie to Catholicism – the joyful lives of young Catholics she met. When the Gospel and grace of Jesus Christ enter our life in a serious way we're changed -- and people notice. We talk about

evangelization and this is how it usually works. It is not primarily a matter of doctrine, in fact, the teaching of the Church can initially be a block – as it was with Rosalie. But she was in that church, at that mass, because she had been touched by grace-filled young adults – and she was asked to go to mass by a friend. Those are things we should take note of. Is our own faith real enough that people associate it with us – and we are motivated by the faith to invite others to share it?

But, while the teaching and disciplines of the Church (in Rosalie's case regarding the Eucharist) can begin as obstacles for people, we should never water them down, hide them, or be embarrassed by them. Yes, the audience in the Gospel today murmur because Jesus says He is the bread of life, given for eternal life -- just as Rosalie murmured, to say the least. They are, after all, amazing claims! They do seem too good, or too strange, to be true. But don't you think if God did come and promise eternal life to us human beings what was offered by Him would feel strange and powerful – too much, beyond our full

understanding? That mystery is the power and beauty of the faith and the Eucharist -- and ultimately the very reason why people will want to join us.

There is something in the Body of Christ – the Church and the sacrament – that one can't get anywhere else. That is the source of the joy Rosalie experienced in her young Catholic friends. We have Jesus in a unique way, his very flesh and blood, as he Himself promised in John chapter 6. We are meant to share that truth and grace with as many people as we can. "Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life . . . whoever eats this bread will live forever." How can we deny that to others by our silence?

I can speak from personal experience that the Eucharist changes people. It changed Rosalie dramatically. I felt in her the same joy in life that she must have seen in those faithful Catholic friends of hers she had known at the University of Wyoming so many years ago. That same joy is also available to all who believe that the Bread of Life is the Body,

Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Jesus - and consume Him worthily. Let us
live and share that truth boldly!