

Twentieth Sunday of the year August 16, 2015

Proverbs 9:1-6; Ephesians 5:15-20; John 6:51-58

Jesus when he began his public ministry announced that he has come to establish the Kingdom of God and told the people that it is close at hand. The Kingdom is understood as God's rule in the heart of every person. We are all invited to be part of the Kingdom, to be signs of unity and harmony in Jesus. The Church is the external expression of the Kingdom. It needs a deep insight and grace to accept his invitation. The recognition and faith bring us closer to Jesus and to his Eucharistic banquet. It is important that we listen to his call and accept his invitation to be in communion with him. It is the desire of every human person to be in communion with the ultimate. To be in full communion with God means to obey the commandments of God so that you may be in perfect harmony in our daily personal relationship with Him. In the context of the Church full communion means to obey the teachings of the Church that has been instituted on earth through Jesus. It also means that it is a call to faith to know the ways of the Lord in our life and be faithful to him. In the Gospel of today Jesus tells his listeners that he is the bread of life. Some found it difficult to accept his teachings but to those accepted him he gave the gift of faith. In the first reading we have the wisdom send out an invitation. At her house people will find life and the path to understanding. In the second reading we are challenged to get rid of all evil and foolishness. We are to be filled with the Holy Spirit and dedicate our lives to Christ.

First Reading of today speaks to us in a symbolic way about the Divine Wisdom. Many of the proverbs given here are attributed to Solomon. A prevalent theme that runs through the book is to make right choice in life. Of course the right choice is the one that leads to God and to life. The reading of today starts with the description of a Wisdom's house. It is beautiful and easy to find a house constructed with seven pillars gracing the front. Here Wisdom has prepared a magnificent banquet and then sent out her servants to call all those who are ignorant, who lack wisdom, asking them to come, eat of the bread and drink of the wine. The one who responds is called upon to lay aside immaturity and live and walk in the way of wisdom and insight. Those who need the insight and guidance are welcome. In other words, God is establishing His Kingdom on earth as in Heaven and invites all to be part of it. The number seven is symbolic of perfection. The reading also includes a warning to avoid a way of life that ignores God and seeks only the things of this world. This limited and dangerous viewpoint is represented by folly who invites people to her house too. But her home offers only bread and water. All those who enter her home find themselves on the path that leads to ignorance and death. This was a prophetic and symbolic reference to Christ instituting the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist on the night of the Last Supper.

The Second Reading of today Paul urges the Ephesians to express their gratitude to God always and everywhere by singing to the Lord in their hearts. In their behavior he calls on them not to be foolish but to be wise. Speaking to the Ephesian converts Paul says that they must be careful how they live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil and in this way they must understand the will of the Lord in their life. Knowing the will of the Lord and applying it, are two different things. It is no different than having mere words without any actions. Those who believe in Christ must apply the love of Christ towards God

and others through their actions. The children of God are called to be filled with the Spirit, to continuously praise God in all things, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among themselves, thus showing gratitude to the Father at all times and for everything in the name of Jesus Christ. It is when we are filled with the Flesh and Blood of Christ that we are filled with true wisdom. Wisdom is to know what the will of God is in our own life situation. Wisdom is to know the real values in life. Wisdom is to know how to live a life that is fully-functioning. It is suggested that the only real wise ones that should ever pursue the wisdom. Paul tells them that the Lord showed how to live by his example. He was wise by using every opportunity to do well. His life reveals his will for us.

The theme of the Gospel of today is Jesus as the Bread of Life. Throughout the bread of life discourse, the intensity has gradually increased as the focus has moved from Jesus feeding the people with bread and fish to Jesus feeding the people with himself. The climax comes to this present section where Jesus will clearly indicate that the bread of life in fact is his own flesh. The Lord had already promised the people that whoever eats of this bread will live forever. He is their nourishment and strength. But now a startling new dimension is added that the bread that he will give is his own flesh for the life of the world, meaning that he is ready to give himself to them. Hence the immediate reaction of the people was dismay and alarm and to say how could this man Jesus could give them his flesh to eat. They were not able to understand the very meaning of it. In the Israelite tradition there was no mention of human sacrifice or cannibalism. Now Jesus intends to go even further and clarify. He told them that unless they eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, they will not have life in them. Here we realize the purpose of John of placing the Eucharist early in his Gospel rather than at the Last Supper. For John it is all of Jesus' life that institutes the Eucharist and not just at one particular instant, the Last Supper. Those who partake of the Eucharist share in all of the Life of Jesus and enter into an intimate relationship with him that brings new life. Daily during the Eucharist the priest repeats these words of Jesus But we must think of being there with Jesus on that day and hear those words of Jesus when he says unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood you will not have life.

The Gospel of today places strong emphasis on Jesus the Living Bread. This section begins with the claim of Jesus that he is the living bread come down from heaven. This indicates the divine nature of Jesus. This bread in fact is his person which he will give for the life of the world. Once again the declaration of Jesus leads to a serious argument among the Jews over the possible meaning of what he said. Jesus takes this opportunity to move his words to a deeper level. Not only Jesus himself is the bread of life but eating his flesh and drinking his blood are essential to have real life. Jesus was speaking of eternal life which only Jesus can provide. The Greek word used here for eating is one that the early church employed when making reference to Eucharist. In many ways the unfolding of Eucharist in the Gospel of John exceeds what we have in the Synoptic Gospels where the event is narrated with little explanation. John emphasizes a strong relationship aspect to the Eucharist. By sharing in the Eucharist the believer not only receives Jesus himself, but also enters into a life-giving relationship with him. The believers actually enter into that new life which Jesus alone can give. This new life is not only for the moment but is forever. It creates and sustains a divine mutuality that can only be expressed by the words "eternal life."

Today when Jesus speaks of the eating of his flesh he intends to tell us of the Eucharist. To eat the flesh of Jesus and to drink his blood is to become totally identified with his very person, with his deepest thoughts, with his vision of life, with his values, and with his mission to build the Kingdom of God. Here again Jesus brings in the concept of the total identity with the divinity with the sharing in the meal during a sacrifice. The Jews understood him to be speaking literally and they could not understand how he a human person shares something unheard of, namely his flesh. They were unable to understand his divinity and that he has come from God. Jesus did not try to correct their objections but re-emphasizes the fact of sharing of him with humanity. We have here something more to believe in. The flesh and blood of Jesus was, above all, that part of him which he totally surrendered in his suffering and death and offered it to his Father. This is John's way of putting the Synoptic passage that: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and the Gospel will save it." Jesus is calling everyone to follow him, to be with him, to share totally and unconditionally his mission, life and destiny. In this context if we are totally identified with Jesus and his mission, it is always possible.

We are now reminded of the miracle of the multiplication of bread where the five thousand and more people were fed along with the fish the boy had, tells us of the Last Supper and thus of the Eucharist. The sharing of one bread and one cup brings in the unity, the contract between Jesus and humankind. It was at the Last Supper that Jesus linked his flesh with the bread he broke and shared it with his disciples and linked his blood with the cup that was passed around, the blood that was the pledge of an unbreakable bond between Jesus and his people. In eating the Bread and drinking from the Cup we are proclaiming our deepest desire to be totally identified with Jesus, with his Way, with his Mission to building the Kingdom. He tells the people that they have to partake of his body and blood if they wish to have true life in them. This partaking of him will give them eternal life. On the Day of Judgment those who have partaken of his life-giving nourishment will be raised from the dead and enjoy the eternal life. Intimate union with Christ will be the effect of partaking of his sacrificed body. In reality in the pagan sacrifices the eating of meat sacrificed to the gods identified the eater with gods. In the context of Jesus the eating of the flesh meant the divinity of Jesus which the Jews refused to accept.

Jesus identified himself as the Bread of Life. He told those present that unless they eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, they would have no life in them. They will have eternal life, and he would raise them up on the last day. The people during the time of Jesus believed that blood contained life and by drinking it they could enhance their life. They were brought up with the animal sacrifices and the blood of the animal became a special offering. It brought them into communion with the divine. Let us look into ourselves and see whether we are in full communion with God through the Eucharist. It is essential for us to listen to Jesus and put his teaching into practice to have the full life in him. We know that Jesus is truly present in the Eucharist. His presence is not only physical or moral or spiritual but is sacramental. The reality of the bread becomes the reality of the glorified body of Jesus and the reality of the wine becomes the reality of the blood of Jesus. Since Jesus cannot be divided, wherever his body is there are also his soul, divinity and blood and wherever his blood is there also are his soul, divinity and body. Through

the Eucharist Jesus is giving us a share in the life that the Father shares with his Son, a true communion with the real person of the risen Lord. The early church understood this and the Eucharist made a difference in their lives. It made it possible to bear each day their joys, struggles and sufferings.

As we offer the Mass and receive the Eucharist let us develop a respect and awe for the presence of our Lord. This participation will enable us to participate in the community of the church. As in the first reading Wisdom has set a table and has invited us to partake in the meal. In the Gospel Jesus also sets a table for the meal. His menu consists of his own body and blood and we are called upon to partake in it worthily. Jesus wants everyone to be part of his life and mission and hence of the messianic banquet. It needs a deep insight and grace to accept his invitation. The recognition and faith bring us closer to Jesus and to his Eucharistic banquet. It is important that we listen to his call and accept his invitation to be in communion with him. Our invitation to the banquet, demands that we replace immaturity with spiritual insight. The recognition and faith bring us closer to Jesus and to his Eucharistic banquet. It is important that we listen to his call and accept his invitation to be in communion with him. Let us thank the Lord, through Mary, for having allowed us to come closer to him in the Eucharist.

As a drought continued for what seemed an eternity, a small community of farmers was in a quandary as to what to do. Rain was important to keep their crops healthy and sustain the way of life of the townspeople. As the problem became more acute, a local pastor called a prayer meeting to ask for rain. Many people arrived. The pastor greeted most of them as they filed in. As he walked to the front of the church to officially begin the meeting he noticed most people were chatting across the aisles and socializing with friends. When he reached the front his thoughts were on quieting the attendees and starting the meeting. His eyes scanned the crowd as he asked for quiet. He noticed an eleven year-old girl sitting quietly in the front row. Her face was beaming with excitement. Next to her, poised and ready for use, was a bright red umbrella. The little girl's beauty and innocence made the pastor smile as he realized how much faith she possessed. No one else in the congregation had brought an umbrella. All came to pray for rain, but the little girl had come expecting God to answer.

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