

Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B Readings and Commentary

Celebration Summary by Glenn CJ Byer, MA SLD: This Gospel this week sees us complete the actual message on the bread of life. Next week we will see the fallout from Christ's words. It is an interesting joining of readings this week, with the bread of life, the flesh and blood of Jesus, being seen as true food and the wisdom of God being true food in the first reading. In both cases, people need to be urged to partake of food that will give them life of wisdom, it is almost as if we did not know what was good for us and needed to be told again and again to eat good foods instead of those which are not healthy or even are bad for us.

What is different in this case from when Mom used to tell us to eat our vegetables is found in the psalm; the food Christ offers and the wisdom of God in the first reading are both taste of goodness. Psalm 34 makes this clear and urges those who have tasted how good God is to react with praise and glorify the Father.

The Ephesians reading completes this set of interesting associations of readings. Here ignorance and the drinking an excess of earthly wine is seen as contrary to the will of God. Wisdom is good wine that never gets a person drunk; drinking a full measure of the Spirit is how we come to know what is right and good and so can offer praise and thanks - it is at the heart of what we offer at Mass.

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First Reading Proverbs 9:1-6

Come, eat of my food and drink of the wine I have mixed.

A reading from the Book of Proverbs

Wisdom has built her house,
she has set up her seven columns;
she has dressed her meat, mixed her wine,
yes, she has spread her table.
She has sent out her maidens; she calls
from the heights out over the city:
"Let whoever is simple turn in here;
to the one who lacks understanding, she says,
Come, eat of my food,
and drink of the wine I have mixed!

Forsake foolishness that you may live;
advance in the way of understanding."

The word of the Lord.

Proverbs 9:1-6 Commentary by Deacon Owen Cummings:
Personified Wisdom, who is with God when he creates the world (Prov. 8:27-30), has built her house and invites to her banquet. Since there can be no "I" without a "Thou", Wisdom is God's appropriate "Thou." Wisdom thus mediates God's presence, or as we might say, is sacrament of God's presence. Coming to her house we find "Wisdom" before us, and there the invitation to eat of her food and drink of her wine is extended to us. Responding to Wisdom in this way is a rejection of "foolishness," and living to the full, "that you may live." This way of thinking about Wisdom in the Wisdom Literature became a powerful tool in early Christianity for mediating Christian understanding of the Lord. For Christians the entire passage is a type of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. He is the One through whom the entire cosmos came into being, the One seminally present in everything, as God creates in him. He too has built himself a house, not of stone but of flesh, the Incarnation as God's habitation. He too invites us to this house, to eat of his food and drink of his wine, but with the food and wine as himself in the Eucharist. We truly live by accepting and responding to Wisdom-Word's invitation to be transformed.

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Second Reading Ephesians 5:15-20

Understand what is the will of the Lord.

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Ephesians

Brothers and sisters:

Watch carefully how you live,
not as foolish persons but as wise,
making the most of the opportunity,
because the days are evil.

Therefore, do not continue in ignorance,

but try to understand what is the will of the Lord.

And do not get drunk on wine, in which lies debauchery,

but be filled with the Spirit,

addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,

singing and playing to the Lord in your hearts,

giving thanks always and for everything
in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father.

The word of the Lord.

Ephesians 5:15-20 Commentary by Deacon Owen Cummings: The hymn that comes immediately to mind when one hears this beautiful passage is the Shaker hymn, "How Can I Keep from Singing?" This text yields what can only be called "the singing self." First, we are presented with the moral consequences of being in Christ. The New American Bible is a little free in translation here. Literally, we are to walk as sophoi, people of wisdom, not a-sophoi, people who lack wisdom. Given our first reading from the Book of Proverbs, we should speak of Wisdom, with the capital. If we are in Christ, in Wisdom, through baptism, then the Christ-Wisdom nature should be ours. We walk his walk, we talk his talk, as our lives are conformed more and more to him. We are to avoid getting drunk on wine, but to be inebriate with Wisdom's Wine-Blood. This Wine-Blood fills us with the Spirit, and makes us a singing self. This singing self, the self-in Christ-through the Spirit, addresses one another in song and praises God in song. The climax is at the end: "Give thanks..." Again, the translation is a little free. More literally, it reads "Constantly giving thanks to God the Father..." "Giving thanks" is in Greek eucharistountes. It is above all the Eucharist in which we eat Wisdom's food and drink the wine-blood that makes us singing selves. If through grace we are being divinized, how can we keep from singing?

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Gospel John 6:51-58

My flesh is true food and my blood is true drink.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John

Jesus said to the crowds:

"I am the living bread that came 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."

The Jews quarreled among themselves, saying,

"How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

Jesus said to them,

"Amen, amen, I say to you,

unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood,
you do not have life within you.
Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood
has eternal life,
and I will raise him on the last day.
For my flesh is true food,
and my blood is true drink.
Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood
remains in me and I in him.
Just as the living Father sent me
and I have life because of the Father,
so also the one who feeds on me
will have life because of me.
This is the bread that came down from heaven.
Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died,
whoever eats this bread will live forever."

The Gospel of the Lord

John 6:51-58 Commentary by Fr. Damien Dougherty, O.F.M.: The narrative sequence of John's chapter six is comprised of five episodes having at its center the discourse on the bread of life. The basic thematic is still the same: the faith necessary in order to obtain life.

The day after the multiplication of the loaves and Jesus' walking on the sea of Galilee recalling the divine power at work with the manna in the desert and over the waters of the Exodus, the third episode (6,22-58), occasions the discourse between Jesus and the crowd who searched for him because they witnessed the multiplication of the bread. Intrigued by Jesus' talk of an eternally enduring food, the people ask the means for access to it and, in response, Jesus demands belief in the one sent from the Father and identifies the bread of life guaranteeing freedom from hunger and thirst with himself.

Confronted with their murmuring, Jesus does not back down or mitigate his statement; rather he emphasizes persistently that his own flesh will have to be eaten. Perhaps to thwart any, eventual pseudo-spiritualizing of the dynamic involved, John stresses the actual, physical eating of Jesus' flesh with his choice of verbs as the literal translation is "to gnaw," "to munch." In other words, you cannot have life without believing within his death for the life of the world and such a faith is expressed within eating his flesh and drinking his blood precisely because the person who lives for him can only do so by being nourished by him. © 2003, OCP. All rights reserved.