

TWENTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME-B

August 19, 2018

First Reading – Proverbs 9:1-6

Responsorial Psalm – Psalm 34

Second Reading – Ephesians 5:15-20

Gospel – John 6:51-58

My dear people of God:

Today, we will continue reflecting on the Sustenance that God provides us: the Body and Blood of His Son. My prayer is that we will continue hungering and thirsting for Jesus, that we will always prepare our souls to receive Him in Holy Communion, because He is our food while on our journey to His Father.

Let us see what the First Reading offers us:

We are reading now the Book of Proverbs. This book is a part of the Wisdom Books. King Solomon has been credited with compiling this book. Whoever be the source of this book, we know for sure that it is inspired by God, and is a worthy source of wisdom.

Wisdom is first personified as a woman in the Book of Proverbs. The basis for the particular personification of Wisdom as a woman lies in the feminine gender of the Hebrew word for wisdom, *hokmah*. *The personification of Wisdom in today's passage is paired with a personification of Foolishness in Proverbs 9:13-18, also as a woman.* The similar structures of the two passages indicate that they are to be read together and in contrast.

Both Wisdom and Foolishness invite the "simple" (that is, the unlearned) into their houses for a meal, using the same invitation (verse 4 and verse 16). But while Wisdom has gone so far as to build her own house, prepare her own meal, and to make efforts to invite people in, Foolishness merely sits at the door of her house, calling to whoever happens to pass by (verses 14-15), and

her meals are stolen (verse 17). Moreover, while Wisdom's meal leads to life (verse 6), Foolishness kills her guests (verse 18).

The description of Wisdom's meal paints a picture of a true feast; either in a lavish or in a sacred setting. The opening verse states that she has built her own house and that this construction involved setting up "*seven pillars.*" Pillars would only be used in building a house of substantial size and quality, and the number seven implies some special character to the house. This perhaps is a reference to the *mythic pillars of the foundation of the earth*.

The meal itself and the invitation likewise indicate the rich and open nature of the feast. Wisdom has slaughtered multiple animals and set a table (verse 2), indicating that this meal is beyond the everyday meals of the average Israelite.

Wine will be served (verse 2). She has sent her servant girls to issue the invitation where all can hear it (verse 3). It is a rich feast; all are invited - including the person who lacks understanding.

Partaking of this feast leads to life (verse 6). The connection between Wisdom and Life is frequently made in the Book of Proverbs. Chapter 8, verse 35 says: "*For whoever finds me, finds life*". "Long life is in her right hand, she is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her" (3:16a, 18a). Please allow me to guide you into the meaning of this poetic genre: to accept Wisdom's invitation is to embrace the life that God has designed for us. Paul, in discussing the propensity of the Jews for signs(faith) and the propensity of the Greeks for proofs(reason), in his first letter to the Corinthians, chapter 1, verse 24 says that Christ is the Power of God and the Wisdom of God. Partaking of Christ in Holy Communion would make us partakers of the Wisdom of God, and encounter Life with God in heaven.

Our first reading can lead us to a wider appreciation of Scripture. In the New Testament, we will come to an understanding of WHO CHRIST IS. The connection between wisdom and creation in Proverbs is a significant part of the foundation for our understanding of Christ's pre-existence and involvement in creation as it appears in the New Testament, seen especially in John's gospel, chapter 1, verses 1 to 5, and in the letter to Colossians, chapter 1, verse 15 to 20, and in the letter to the Hebrews, chapter 1, verses 1 to 4.

Now let us go to the second reading: We are called upon to walk as wise people. That means to live a life that is a result of a careful consideration; an outgrowth of thought, of purpose, of deliberate and disciplined action.

Walking carefully and wisely is walking in the Spirit. Living a God-directed life, a well examined life, assures us of ETERNAL LIFE after this life. Not to live as God wants us to, is to run against the very grain of human existence. To reverse LIVE is EVIL. Try spelling live in reverse.

Evil days present us with many distractions and diversions. While we have more free time due to the speed of the internet, the speed of the microwave, we seem to have the greater tendency to waste time. I remember when I was confronted by a cop, years ago, why I was driving beyond the speed limit, and I foolishly answered: *to save time, officer*". And he asked me: "*and what do you do with the time you save, Reverend?*". While reading my ticket, I laughed at my own stupidity. My driving was not an outgrowth of thought, purpose, and disciplined action. No wonder, it was the cop who disciplined me.

Brothers and sisters, we must seize the opportunity to know God's will by being intoxicated by the will of the Lord. To fail to know God's will and to fail to do it would be foolish. Paul implies that drunkenness is surely not doing God's will.

There is an implied relationship between getting drunk with wine and being filled with the Holy Spirit. This relationship has but one similarity, and that is the similarity of "getting drunk" with "being filled." Both terms imply a control over an individual by an outside force, which alters one's thinking and conduct.

The control which wine gains over the drunk person is detrimental and even destructive, while the control of the Spirit produces well being, clear thinking; a wisdom which is beyond human abilities, and conduct. It benefits those with whom we associate. Drunkenness results in dissipation, utter waste. Being filled with the Spirit is fruitful, beneficial, edifying.

Being filled with the Spirit would make us closer to one another. Church gatherings, singing and praying to the Lord in thanksgiving are wonderful fruits of being intoxicated by the Spirit. Such thanksgiving not only recognizes the existence of God, but the sovereign involvement God has in our lives. It recognizes that all that happens in our lives is from God, that every good and perfect gift is from Him, for our good and for His greater glory.

Now, let us go to the Gospel. The last portion of last Sunday's Gospel is repeated in today's Gospel. As we reflected last week, Jesus promised that

those who eat of the spiritual bread that He offers will never die. *"I am the living bread which came down from heaven"* (verse 51a). This "living bread" parallels the "living water" that Jesus offered the Samaritan woman (John 4:10). Last week, we also reflected upon the sacrificial language that accompanied the "gift of one's flesh" as the greatest and most personal of all sacrifices. Jesus made His sacrifice in behalf of the world; not just Israel.

Today we will reflect on the revelatory words spoken by Jesus; words that heightened the already conflicted atmosphere. In last week gospel, the Jews were grumbling against Jesus. Today, the Jews in verse 52 are *"arguing among themselves"*. They questioned how Jesus is able to offer his body for them to eat. And Jesus even added more stimulant into the debate: "drinking the blood"

Jesus confronted the Jews with a choice through first a negative and then a positive situation. In a double negation, Jesus said in verse 53 *"if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life in yourselves."* Then in the next verse in a straightforward positive statement He said: *"those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day."*

Last week the choice was that of relationship -- coming to Jesus. This week, it is that of participation - eating the body and drinking the blood. For the Jews, either choice was a difficult one. Either one demanded a break from tradition.

My dear people of God, we know that our own salvation depends on choosing both: relationship and participation.

Obviously the crowd misinterpreted the sign of feeding the huge group with only five pieces of bread and two fish from the boy. The Jews thought that it was about bread. NO, not at all. It has been about JESUS and who HE is. The bread was just a sign. The sign was to point to Jesus. Instead they did not want a relationship. Today we will go beyond the sign. We who believe in Jesus must partake of Him in Holy Communion. Amen.