

**ECHOING GOD'S WORD
IN THE
CATHOLIC FAITH COMMUNITY**

TWENTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

August 18, 2024

SCRIPTURES:

Proverbs 9:1-6

God invites his people to a feast.

Ephesians 5:15-20

Watch your conduct and you will know God's will.

John 6:51-58

Jesus gives his Body and Blood as real food.

READ THE SCRIPTURES:

Read the Scriptures carefully in your group beginning with the Gospel. Take a few minutes in silence to hear the Lord speaking to the heart. Remember that the word of God in the Bible is primarily addressed to the Church Community. What does God want the community to hear today?

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND:

Proverbs:

The Book of Proverbs as we know it was most likely put into its final form around 300 years before the Common Era. Although attributed to Solomon, it contains wisdom writings from many different sources and different ages. *Wisdom* is an attribute of God. In this book, Wisdom is portrayed as a gracious and insightful woman, in contrast to Folly which is portrayed as a harlot. Wisdom prepares a plentiful feast for those who choose her; Folly will only give stolen food which leads to death. The issue is that Folly gives its food immediately. For Wisdom's food, one has to wait. The lesson seems to be that immediate gratification has no lasting value. It is better to wait for what God will give rather than to grasp at what the world gives.

Ephesians:

The ways of the wise and the ways of the foolish are contrasted in this letter as they are in the Book of Proverbs. The wise know how to use *time or opportunity*, as the new American Bible puts it. The Greek word *kairos* means more than just the passing of moments. It speaks of the content of the time that God has given us; therefore, the *opportunity* to make good use of our lives for the sake of God's kingdom. Early Christians were especially aware of the shortness of *time*, how Christ was about to return in judgment upon the world. Disciples had to make the best use of the short time afforded them in this world.

John:

In the long Bread of Life Discourse (John 6:22-59), the evangelist alternates between two notions of the Bread of Life: 1. The *Teaching of Jesus* which gives life to those who receive it. 2. The *Sacramental Body* of Christ given in Eucharist. In this passage, of course, we are dealing with the Eucharist.

The emphasis of the Gospel here is on the *eating and drinking of the flesh and blood*. Earlier in this chapter, Jesus asks that we believe that God gives bread from heaven. Once we believe, then we are to eat.

The *flesh* in John's Gospel is not that perishable part of our humanity that serves as an impediment to the *spirit*. Flesh and blood in John mean the whole tangible reality of the human person that lives in history, on the face of the earth: the entire reality of Jesus Christ the Lord. Eating the flesh and drinking the blood of the Lord means to enter into a tangible and lasting relationship with the real Jesus in all that he is.

The *Body and Blood* of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist cannot be a mere representation of who he is, as if we entered into a relationship with him only on the mystical or the spiritual level. We truly eat the body and drink the blood of the Lord in the Eucharist as a basis for the spiritual relationship which we have with him. Without that grounding in the reality of Christ's Real Presence in the Eucharist, our relationship with him is only based on our *wishing* to be related to him. The Real Presence is God's action through the power of the Holy Spirit, as God's initiative, to make real the transformation of our whole lives into the reality of Christ's life. We have this life within us since we have eaten the sacrament that gives us the real Christ to be our Savior and our Lord.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How close do you feel you are to Jesus the Lord? Do you have a relationship characterized by friendship? Do you feel Jesus is more of a teacher or a Master than he is a friend? (Do you have any friends with whom you are utterly comfortable and trusting?) When you pray, do you speak spontaneously and even enthusiastically to Jesus? Do you ever pray at all? Do you share everything with Jesus, the good, the bad and the indifferent?

2. When you celebrate the Eucharist, especially at the moment of receiving holy Communion, do you have a clear sense that Jesus Christ is really present to you in a special way? Are you convinced that God gives you a share in the life of the Risen Christ each time you approach the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ? Are you conscious of the fact that life everlasting is imparted to you when you eat the body and drink the blood of Christ?

3. What have you been in the habit of doing to provide for the poor as part of your response to Jesus Christ? Do you feel that you have to give something as you receive the body and blood of Christ? What do you think you have to give? What do you bring to the assembly of faith when you come to celebrate the Eucharist? Do you at least pray for those who are alienated from God and from people?

PRAYER

**God of mercy,
by this sacrament you make us one with Christ.
By becoming more like him on earth,
may we come to share his glory in heaven.**

Prayer after Communion, 20th Sunday of the Year

CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

The Council of Trent, after the beginning of the Protestant Reformation, attempted to refocus and redefine the essential element of the Catholic faith. In a decree on the Mass, the council said that five elements were needed for an authentic celebration of the Eucharist: 1. The Assembly of the Faithful; 2. The Bread and the Wine; 3. The Word of God proclaimed from the Scriptures; 4. A Collection for the Poor; 5. An ordained presider. I wonder whether, after 450 years, we have yet taken all of that teaching seriously.

I want to point out the fourth item in that list: A Collection for the Poor. We cannot authentically celebrate the Eucharist of the Lord without paying special attention to the poor.

The earliest eucharistic meals were celebrated in the context of a regular meal, to which people brought the food to be eaten and to be offered. St. Paul points to some abuses here when he writes to the Corinthians. Some are well-fed, while others go hungry! Has anything changed over all these centuries?

It has been suggested that we might do better to have the presider and the extraordinary ministers of holy Communion eat and drink the bread and wine only after the assembly has been fed. They should set aside the food for the poor, and only then should they eat and drink themselves!

In your parish, some people bring bags of food for the local community food pantry, which serves hundreds of poor people every week. They place these at the church entrance as they come in. They have a very special participation in the Eucharist that follows when they do this sharing first. When I first came to one parish some time ago, I would stand outside the entrance door to greet people as they came in. Some people grumbled that I was watching who brought food and who didn't! Then, I began to stand inside the entrance so that people can give more anonymously. Some do want to give without being noticed!

The Prayers of the Faithful are also a way in which we bring something for the poor. The most needy, of course, are those who need spiritual gifts; all of us!

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