

FIRST IMPRESSIONS 20th SUNDAY (B)

Proverbs 9: 1-6 Psalm 34 Ephesians 5: 15-20 John 6: 51-58

by Jude Siciliano, O.P.

Dear Preachers:

Proverbs personifies Wisdom, an attribute of God, in feminine images. For those who are hungry for “understanding,” the knowledge of God and God’s ways, Wisdom sets a sumptuous banquet and bids a universal welcome. “Let whoever is simple, turn in here.” When we are physically hungry there is no doubting what we must do – find something to eat.

Perhaps we’ve tried eating at other tables: tried living by mere human wisdom; put our security and trust in material things; relied on temporary and superficial appearances and even put off feeding our spirits to another time, etc. Those of us who are well-educated may have thought book learning would give us answers to life’s imponderables. The results have left us still hungry; like trying to fill our stomachs eating just lettuce. We may feel some initial satisfaction, but it soon passes and all we can think of is where we can find food.

The Book of Proverbs sums up such vain pursuits later in chapter 9, describing Folly’s “banquet” (vs. 13 – 18) as the place some have gone to find wisdom. In our country there is a lot to read these days about the nutritional value of the foods we eat and our tendency to consume “empty calories,” that, in the long run, do more harm than good. We should be smart about what we take into our bodies – we should be wise about what feeds our spirits. Wisdom extends an invitation, “Welcome to my sumptuous banquet. Eat, there’s plenty of good food for everyone.”

Wisdom, described, in feminine terms, takes flesh in Jesus, who reveals God’s love and concern that we take in the right kind of nourishment. God says to us, “I see your hungers that only I can satisfy fully. I send you my Son, Wisdom enfleshed. Take in the food and drink he offers you – his very self.” While the crowds quarrel among themselves and with Jesus, he speaks directly to those who hunger and thirst. Like Wisdom in Proverbs, he sets a table and invites them to be nourished on himself, “true food... true drink.”

John’s gospel does not have the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper. The three Synoptics do, so John, the last gospel written, presumes we know that story.

What John has in chapter 6 to is the “Bread of Life Discourse.” In the discourse the theme of Wisdom (verses 35 – 50) is blended with the eucharistic theme – as seen in today’s reading. The language in today’s section of the Discourse shifts, with the occurrence of words like: “eat,” “food,” “drink,” “flesh,” “blood.” The language has become literal, even crude. Jesus’ realism in this passage stirs controversy among his listeners. “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”

We have heard these expressions so frequently in our liturgical, biblical and faith language and have become accustomed to them. But we miss the shock value they had on their original hearers. Today’s gospel captures some of the impact of Jesus’ words on his contemporaries. The crowds take Jesus’ words literally and later we behold that many of his own disciples turn away from him because of what he said. That there should be arguments over the meaning of Jesus’s words should not surprise us: we still have disagreements among Christian denominations over how to interpret what he meant.

The “Bread of Life Discourse” was prompted by Jesus’ feeding the crowd with real bread. That got their attention; he satisfied their physical hunger. But that was only a starting point for further conversation about another kind of bread he would give us – himself. This is the bread that would feed our deepest hungers. To convey the reality of that kind of feeding, Jesus’ language becomes more concrete. We will hear it again at this Eucharist: “Take... and eat, this is my body. Take... and drink, this is my blood.”

Is there anything Jesus is holding back from us? How much more could he give than his “flesh and blood” – his whole self? Can we hear in Jesus’s words and self-giving how close God wants to get to us? God’s very life mingles with our lives so that our lives can become one with God’s. Jesus makes that promise to us: eating his flesh and drinking his blood gives us eternal life – not only life on and on forever, as much as deep life – full life – right now. No waiting, eternal life begins now!

Let’s hope that the eating and drinking we do at the Eucharist today will jar our memories so that we remember and act on Jesus’ teachings. Let’s also hope that this meal keeps us connected to the One who gave himself so that we can begin to share now in God’s gift of eternal life.

The food and drink, the body and blood we eat and drink should draw us believers

closer together as a community. Jesus' reference to his blood refers to the life he will pour out for us on the cross. We who partake in the meal are challenged to look beyond ourselves, as he did, to see the needs of the world around us for which he gave his life. We eat and drink because we believe. Others should see that faith enfleshed in our words and actions. We cannot live Jesus' life without eating from the table he has set for us – his body and blood. So, let us, the hungry, approach the table Wisdom has set for us at this Eucharist.

FAITH BOOK

Mini-reflections on the Sunday scripture readings designed for persons on the run. "Faith Book" is also brief enough to be posted in the Sunday parish bulletins people take home.

From today's Proverbs reading:

Wisdom... has spread her table... she calls from the heights out over the city....

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

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

Reflection:

Wisdom takes flesh in Jesus, who reveals God's love and concern that we take in the right kind of nourishment. God says to us, "I see your hungers that only I can fully satisfy. I send you my Son, Take in the food and drink he offers you – his very self." Like Wisdom in Proverbs, Jesus sets a table and invites us to be nourished on himself, "true food... true drink."

So, we ask ourselves:

- How would you describe your spiritual life... Satisfying? Malnourished? Starving?
- What do you do and where do you go to feed your spirit?

JUSTICE BULLETIN BOARD

"Watch carefully how you live"(Ephesians 5:15)

"Catholic parishes can help to promote a greater understanding of, and response to, the issues affecting family-based, owner-operated farming. This is important both in terms of the Church's social teaching and also raising awareness on topics, such as the elements of the "food chain," the quality and safety of food products, organic farming practices and public-policy issues, including those pertaining to trade and global food policies." (*Economic Hardships Affecting Rural Life: Catholic Bishops of Nebraska* May 1999)

10 Ways to Be a Good Steward of Creation

Buy Local!

1. Spend \$10/week on locally produced foods and ask your supermarket manager to stock locally produced fruits and vegetables in season.

Community Supported Agriculture

2. Become a member of a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm and get wonderful local, seasonal produce from May through October.

Show Your Thanks!

3. Be thankful for your food and reflect on the goodness of creation before eating any food.

Educate Self & Others

4. Educate yourself about how our food system presently works so you know where your food comes from.
5. Help create links between your child's school lunch program and local farmers.

Choose Wisely

6. Eat seasonally and regionally and get in touch with your local environment. Buy only meat that you know has been produced humanely and sustainably.

Protect When You Can

7. Help protect local water quality by using pesticide-free agriculture and food products.

Learn New Ways to Cook

8. Learn how to freeze, can and store seasonal fruits and vegetables produced in your local area.

Eat Well!

9. Educate yourself about the benefits of eating a diet that includes lots of fresh produce and whole grains.
10. Accept responsibility for making sure that all members of your community have access to an adequate supply of wholesome food. (Adapted from *25 Ways to be a*

Good Steward of Creation)

<http://www.ncrlc.com/25WaysGoodStewardCreation.html>

(Submitted by Anne and Bill Werdel, from the parish bulletin of Sacred Heart Cathedral, Raleigh, N. C.)

POSTCARDS TO DEATH ROW INMATES

Inmates on death row are the most forgotten people in the prison system. Each week I post in this space several inmates' names and addresses. I invite you to write a postcard to one or more of them to let them know we have not forgotten them. If you like, tell them you heard about them through North Carolina's, "People of Faith Against the Death Penalty." If the inmate responds you might consider becoming pen pals.

Please write to:

- Johnny Hyde #0542024 (On death row since 7/23/98)
- Patrick Steen #0388640 (8/28/98)
- Robert Brewington #0584095 (9/3/98)

----Central Prison 1300 Western Blvd. Raleigh, N.C. 27606

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Our webpage addresses: <https://www.PreacherExchange.com>

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Thank you.

“Blessings on your preaching”,

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