

B20TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME/2006

I want to start the homily today by telling you a story: "You know that I come from a country called the Democratic Republic of Congo. It is a potentially rich country, but whose population is very poor. In the central-south region where I come from, there are a lot of diamonds and many dealers are involved in the trade. I have seen people becoming easily millionaires, but I have also seen them losing everything and becoming poorer than they were before. Among many reasons explaining such a setback, there is a lack of balance in the appreciation and the evaluation of the future of life; it is all about what to do in the short-term and the long-term when dealing with money and life. I call such a balance the "wisdom" of life. When such wisdom is lacking, someone can go from good to bad, and from bad to worse.

The 1st reading, using pictorial language, compares Wisdom to a rich and pretty lady who has prepared a wonderful dinner with exquisite wines and excellent meat, and invited the guests to her house for the feast. Those invited are the needy, the poor, the simple and the ignorant who are unhappy because they do not possess the wisdom of life. These are all the people who ruin their existence by behaving foolishly. To those in search of liberation and understanding, the invitation is given gratuitously to come, to eat and drink at their fill.

Wisdom is the word of God that enlightens anyone who lives in darkness of sin and death. It is given so that that everyone makes it his/her own and translates it into concrete attitudes that lead to life and not to death.

This is why St Paul recommends to the Christians, as we heard in the 2nd reading, to make wise choices in whatever difficult situation they may find themselves. They should behave like wise men, and not like foolish people who are unable to distinguish the good and the bad, the right and the wrong. The reason he gives for that lies in the fact that as Christians, we live in a bad time where materialism tries to prevail over spiritual values and relativism over absolute values. In this context, it is easy to forget the will of God and the reason why we have being created. Given the evil days, it is important to make profitable any opportunity by being watchful and wise in life. Therefore, drunkenness and debauchery are plagues which can destroy the perceptiveness of living according to the will of the Lord.

St Paul well is not condemning the present time as though it is worse than the good old times. In fact, each epoch, in the past as well as in the recent history of humanity, has had its moments of glory and troubles. What he wants is to remind us that without being watchful in life, we run the risk of ruining our lives. In other words, the wise Christian admits that the evil still has strong hold on the world, but in spite of the difficulties he/she knows well, he/she does not give up and get discouraged. What she/he does is to strive in making the best of the present time for the glory of God and her/his salvation.

To come to such a purpose requires that we might be filled with the Holy Spirit; we focus our life continually on prayer, thanking God always and for everything in

the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. But, who is this Jesus St Paul recommends that all our prayers may be done in his name?

As a matter of fact, for four consecutive Sundays we heard in the Gospel Jesus presenting himself as the living bread come down from heaven. The Jews have understood that he was referring to his message and teaching, the wisdom of God made bread for mankind. This was not small thing; that is why they were complaining about that speech. But in today's Gospel Jesus goes further by saying that that bread to eat is his own flesh. He even added that his flesh is a real food and his blood is a real drink.

Mind you that anytime Jesus said something and he was misunderstood, he always corrected it. We have an example in John 11: when he was talking about Lazarus as sleeping, the disciples said if it is so, then that is fine. He directly corrected by saying that he is dead. Another example comes from the passion when he was asked if he was a King. He accepted, but at the same he corrected that his Kingdom was not of this world. But about his flesh to be eaten and his blood to be drunk, he did not correct. In other words, he meant it and let the Jews take it as such.

In fact, according to Jewish anthropology "flesh" does not mean just muscles, but the whole person. Then, we understand the reaction of Jews who wondered, "How this man can give his flesh to eat"? They have understood that Jesus does not mean only a spiritual assimilation of his message or a symbolic food, but a real "eating", a meal. All these words will become true at the last Super as Jesus leaves his person under the signs of bread to eat and the wine to drink in order to have eternal life.

Here we have to take Jesus seriously. If, in order to have eternal life, one needs just to have faith in Jesus and to accept his word, why does he add these very difficult declarations that "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you do not have life in you"? Why does he say "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him"? As we can see, it is all about the Eucharist.

Eucharist is the sacrament that makes the person of Jesus really present. Anytime the Eucharist is celebrated, the death and the resurrection of Christ are re-actualized so that his sacrifice on the cross is concomitant to all the times and all the generations. Eucharist is not a substitute for faith or the word of Christ; it is not a magic act. To receive the Eucharist means to be assimilated with Christ, to be identified with him. This is why it is important to listen to the word of God before receiving the Eucharist. If we choose to become one with Christ, we must first accept his teaching. It is like signing a contract; one must first read and assess its clauses carefully.

The words of Jesus in today's Gospel lead us to a wonderful revelation, a profound mystery of our faith, namely that when we receive the Eucharist Christ dwells in us as he dwells in his Father. When we receive the Eucharist, we enter with Jesus into the same sacrifice of worship of the Father, a sacrifice that heals and cleanses us from sins. Along with Jesus we receive also the gifts of the

Father's love and the gift of his Spirit. The men and women who eat his flesh and drink his blood share in the divine unity: Christ dwells in them and them in him. The mutual indwelling which the Eucharistic eating and drinking brings repeats the Father-Son relationship between Jesus and the believer.

Bread today, for the western world, is an additional meal; it is never the main event. But for many people in the time of Jesus as well as in the third world today, it is a meal; it is sustenance. But, bread means more than physical sustenance; it points to friendship. Bread broken and shared at table denotes friendship and fellowship. Bread broken and shared at table denotes intimacy and knowledge of the other. Bread nourishes and strengthens bonds between people and communities. It is a symbol of living together and a bond unity and understanding.

Today in faith, we believe that our Eucharistic bread is the great sign of our life in Christ. Jesus himself nourishes and strengthens us and binds as a community. Jesus is the living bread who offered his body to be broken and his blood to be shed and invites us to join with him as we offer ourselves in service to one another in the world. May God bless you!



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