

## **Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time B/2009**

There are two opposite ways of living: one is foolish, another is wise. To live foolishly means, among many other things, to let oneself be drawn by the wave of circumstances, without any perspective of life and without any fundamental principles that guide that life. To live wisely is to set a goal for one's life; to let it be guided by a fundamental principle that provides a clear vision of what someone wants to achieve, how he has to achieve it, and how all that can contribute to his or her happiness. To choose one or another of these ways has certain consequences, because it can empower someone or destroy him. That is the insight today's readings offer for our meditation.

The first reading describes the functioning process of divine wisdom. It compares wisdom to a thoughtful lady who has prepared a wonderful meal and invites the guests to come and eat. Those who are invited are the simple and the ignorant who can take advantage of the situation and change their fortune.

The goal the lady wisdom is pursuing is to bring the invited guests to come to live happy. There cannot be happiness, however, without abandoning the foolish ways of living and without advancing in the understanding of the mystery of human life that finds its origin and its growth in God.

All that helps us understand the stakes of the second reading as St Paul recommends us to make wise choices in whatever situation coming our way. For St Paul, we have to behave like wise men, and not like foolish people who are unable to distinguish the good from the bad, the right from the wrong.

Why shall we make such a choice? The reason lies in the bad time in which we live. In this time, materialism tends to prevail over spirituality and relativism over absolute values. In this context, it is easy to forget the will of God and the reason why we have been created. Given such days, it is important to make profitable any opportunity by being watchful and wise in life. Therefore, drunkenness and debauchery should be abandoned; they prevent anyone involved in them from living according to God's will.

St Paul's goal here is to remind us that without being watchful in life, we run the risk of ruining our lives. We have to strive to make the best of the present time for the glory of God and for our salvation. What is profitable to us is to be filled with the Spirit of Jesus, to be the people of prayer capable of always thanking God in our hearts and for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus is not an idea or a myth, but a true and living person. In today's Gospel, he presents himself as the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever and the bread he gives is his flesh for the life of the world.

The Jews who heard Jesus speak in this way were shocked and scandalized. However, Jesus did not stop there. He even added that the bread to eat is his own flesh; that his flesh is a real food and his blood is a real drink.

Remember 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 can this man 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 Supper as Jesus leaves his person under the signs of bread to eat and the wine to drink in order to have eternal life.

If, in order to have eternal life, someone 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. The Eucharist is the sacrament of the real presence of Jesus. Anytime we celebrate the Eucharist, we actualize in time the death and the resurrection of Jesus. That is why the Eucharist is concomitant to all times and all generations. To receive the Eucharist is 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.

Today’s Gospel reveals to us 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 that heals us and cleanses us from sins. Along with Jesus, we receive also the gifts of the Father’s love and the gift of his Spirit. When we eat his flesh and drink his blood, we share in the divine unity: he dwells in us and we 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 of unity and understanding. The Eucharistic bread is the great sign of our life in Christ. Jesus himself nourishes and strengthens us and binds us 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!

**Proverbs 9, 1-6; Ephesians 5, 15-20; John 6, 51-58**



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