

20th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B

Proverbs 9:1-6

This passage is from the part of Proverbs in which Wisdom and Folly are represented as matrons, each inviting people to her banquet. Wisdom offers the food and drink of divine doctrine and virtue, which give life. Unstable and senseless folly furnishes the stolen bread and water of deceit and vice which bring death to her guests.⁶

1Wisdom “Wisdom” means far more than knowledge or information. It embraces intuition and sensitivity to the significance of life and events. Wisdom, like faith, brings peace because it enables us to see beyond immediate situations into their lasting or fading significance. It enables us to keep our priorities straight. Wisdom, the poet’s personification of God, also brings life, more than mere existence. It opens us up to the fullness of life, making it possible for us to accept inevitable pain and suffering or to rejoice wholeheartedly in the good things life brings us.¹ Consider that the Blessed Virgin Mary has been given the ancient title of “Seat of Wisdom.”⁴ **has built her house,** This is a reminder that Wisdom was present at creation. (Chapter 8) Her house is the world.² **she has set up her seven columns,** These columns may be the mythic pillars that hold up the universe or they may simply suggest the richness of Wisdom’s house — only expensive homes would have had pillars and seven is the biblical number of fullness, of perfection, and of stability.² Seven is also the number representing covenant.¹⁷

2she has dressed her meat, mixed her wine, Wine was mixed with spices to make it more pleasant to the taste and more heady. Wine is a symbol of the teaching and experience offered by Wisdom; yet a Christian will naturally see here a foreshadowing of the Eucharistic invitation. Meat and wine are festive foods especially when compared to the bread and water of Folly’s table which are mentioned in v. 17.⁴ **yes, she has spread her table.**

3She has sent out her maidens; Lady Wisdom has “sent out” her maidens for she is doing the housework today and herself inviting guests to her supper.³ **she calls from the heights out over the city:**

4“Let whoever is simple Those for whom Proverbs is intended: those who are guileless and sincere.³ Folly addresses them in the same words in verse 16. **turn in here”; to the one who lacks understanding, she says,**

5“Come, eat of my food, and drink of the wine I have mixed! While the Israelites would have thought of the great banquet to take place at the coming of the Messiah, the Christian naturally thinks of the Last Supper, the Eucharist and the heavenly banquet that the Eucharist anticipates.²

6Forsake foolishness This is the only requirement! The word, “foolishness” implies more than being witless as it contains an element of malice for the fool rejects wisdom.⁷ **that you may live; advance in the way of understanding.”** This is an invitation to become all we are capable of becoming as human beings.¹

Ephesians 5:15-20

For the past three weeks we have been exploring St. Paul’s moral section in his Letter to the Ephesians. This week we learn of the Chaste Life Of The Children Of God. Being a Christian also involves being chaste (not celibate, but morally pure in thought) and walking by the light of Christ, which we received at Baptism, and being full of the Holy Spirit.¹⁷

Brothers and sisters:

15 Watch carefully how you live, not as foolish persons but as wise, The new life one receives in Baptism is characterized by a wisdom which contrasts with the foolishness of those who are bent on turning their backs on God. When a person's life is coherent with his faith, true wisdom is the result.⁹

16 making the most of the opportunity, Some translations use the word "time" rather than "opportunity" but either way, it melts away. We only have this present moment.⁹ There is an old poem that begins, "The clock of time is wound but once and no man has the power to tell just where the hands will stop..." St. Augustine explains that when the need arises, we must sacrifice present interests in favor of eternal ones, thereby purchasing eternity with the "coin of time".⁹ Here Paul is urging us to make prudent use of our time by seizing every opportunity to do good. Although we cannot lengthen time or add to our span of life, we can discipline ourselves to use our time more wisely and to fill it more fully.⁸ **because the days are evil.** Paul is saying that the times in which they are living are evil and so they must **RESCUE AS MUCH TIME AS THEY CAN** from the evil uses of the world.¹⁰ (And that was BEFORE movies and tv!)

17 Therefore, do not continue in ignorance, but try to understand what is the will of the Lord. The Catechism says that "By prayer we can discern what is the will of God and obtain the endurance to do it."⁵ (CCC 2826) Romans 12:2 says: "Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by *the renewal of your mind* so that you may judge what is God's will, what is good, pleasing and perfect." The Catechism also speaks of the **FORMATION** of conscience where the Word of God is the light for our path and we must assimilate it in faith and prayer and put it into practice. We must also examine our conscience before the Lord's Cross. We are assisted in all this by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, aided by the witness or advice of others and guided by the authoritative teaching of the Church.⁵ (CCC 1785)

18 And do not get drunk on wine, in which lies debauchery, This verse is an invitation to temperance (Note that Paul advocates temperance and not strict abstinence from alcohol.)⁸ which moderates the attraction of pleasures and provides balance in the use of created goods. Some people both then and now think that happiness and joy can be attained simply through material things. St. Paul identifies the source of true happiness: docility to the action of the Holy Spirit in one's soul. This docility gives a peace and a joy, which the world is incapable of providing.⁹ This may also be a reference to the use of wine in the pagan mystery cults to promote ecstatic experiences.¹

Drunkenness opens the door to all kinds of dissipation, but sobriety enables us to live under the influence of the Spirit.⁸ **but be filled with the Spirit,** Every man is filled with something: either the pleasures of the world or the Holy Spirit. We make a choice.¹⁰ In a pagan environment, so easily found then and now, one often meets people who think that happiness and joy can be attained solely in material things. Saint Paul identifies the source of true happiness—letting the Holy Spirit take over your soul.¹⁷

19 addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and playing to the Lord in your hearts, The Church sees music as her "treasure of inestimable value, greater even than that of any other art." The main reason for this is that it forms a necessary or integral part of the solemn liturgy. In other words, the sung parts of the Mass are exactly that: parts of the Mass. They're not just incidental music to listen to until something else happens in the liturgy; they're part of what's happening. Because man is made up of body and soul, proper worship of God needs to have a certain external expression. There is an old saying: "He prays twice who sings well." However, as Socrates warned time and again, "education in music is most sovereign, because more than anything

else rhythm and harmony find their way to the inmost soul.”¹¹ This is true for what is holy and imparts grace as well as that which encourages morally bad dispositions. It is natural that the outpourings of the soul should be expressed by the senses. St. Augustine wrote of his experience of the liturgy: “I wept at the beauty of your hymns and canticles, and was powerfully moved by the sweet sound of your Church’s singing. Those sounds flowed into my ears, and the truth streamed into my heart—so that my feeling of devotion overflowed, and the tears poured from my eyes, and I was happy in them.”⁹

20giving thanks always and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father.

We need to be continually thanking God. As Paul says again in 1 Thessalonians 5:18: “Give thanks in all circumstances for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.” Everything that happens in life falls within the providence of God. He permits us to experience sorrows and joys, successes and failures. Therefore, for a Christian who acts in line with his faith, everything is success, even things which in human terms he may find negative and painful; for if he views disagreeable things in a supernatural way and approaches them with love for Christ’s cross, they bring him joy and peace and merit.⁹

John 6:51-58

Jesus said to the crowds:

51“I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; This is the third time (verses 35 and 48) that Jesus identifies himself as the Bread of Life. In Hebrew numerology the number three represents completeness. Jesus does not attempt to soften or alter his teaching. It is the literal meaning, not a figurative or metaphorical one, that he is trying to drive home.¹⁷ **and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.**” “For the life of the world” and “for you” refer to the redemptive value of the upcoming sacrifice of Christ on the Cross. In the Old Testament, the ritual of animal sacrifice was not an end in itself, but a means for expressing interior conversion of heart and a desire for a deepening union with God: the animal offered in sacrifice symbolized a person’s giving of himself to God and thus strengthened his relationship with Yahweh. This communion with God is seen especially in the many Israelite sacrifices that required worshippers to eat part of the offered animal. Here we must emphasize the profound biblical meaning of sharing meals, which forged covenant bonds and were interpreted as establishing familial relationships so much so that two enemies could seal a peace agreement by sharing a meal and then, afterwards, even refer to each other as brothers! This covenant-forging power of meals took on even greater meaning when linked with ritual sacrifice because God was involved in the meal. Part of the animal was then offered to God, and part of the animal was consumed by the worshipper. Eating the animal, and not just sacrificing it, sealed communion. This is crucial for understanding the Eucharist. Remember, at Passover it was not enough for the lamb to be sacrificed. Partaking in the lamb was what sealed communion. Hence, if Jesus is the true Passover lamb sacrificed on Calvary, it would not be surprising to find a communion meal accompanying the sacrifice on the Cross. And that is exactly what we find in the Eucharist. Just as God commanded the Jews to eat the sacrificial lamb in the Passover of the Old Covenant, Jesus commanded us to eat the true lamb—His body and blood—in the New Covenant.¹⁴

52The Jews quarreled among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” The Jews are thinking of cannibalism and they know it is a sin to eat a human corpse, an idea thoroughly repugnant to them. This is a misunderstanding. Jesus gives us, not his mortal flesh as it

was during his earthly ministry, but his GLORIFIED humanity as it was AFTER rising from the dead. This is why he calls himself the “living bread.”¹³ If the Jews had thought that Jesus meant this figuratively, they would not have quarreled. Jesus reaffirms what he has said in vv. 54-56, confirming what they have understood him to say.¹⁵

53 Jesus said to them, “Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, The Catholic Church teaches that at the moment of Consecration in the Mass, the substance of the bread and wine are, by the power of Christ working in and through the priest, changed into the Body and Blood, soul and divinity of Christ. This is called the “Real Presence” and though the outward physical characteristics that can be perceived by the senses remain intact, the substance or inward reality that cannot be perceived by the senses has been transformed into the Body and Blood of the Lord. This is among the most ancient of Traditions in the Catholic Church and we can trace it clearly all the way to the mid-point of Jesus Christ’s public ministry. NOTE: There is an abundance of early Church writers who consistently bear witness to the belief in the Real Presence. An example is Bishop Theodore of Mopsuestia who wrote around the year 405: “When Jesus Christ gave the bread he did not say, ‘This is the symbol of my body,’ but ‘This is my body.’ In the same way, when he gave the cup of his blood he did not say, ‘This is the symbol of my blood,’ but, ‘This is my blood,’ for he wanted us to look upon the bread and the wine confectioned in the Eucharistic Liturgy, after their reception of grace and the coming of the Holy Spirit, not according to their nature, but to receive them as they are, the Body and Blood of our Lord.” These early writings are so rich! St. Augustine made the comment to the newly baptized that they should receive the sacrament of the Lord’s Table DAILY!¹⁶ St. Ignatius of Antioch noted by about the year 110 that the Gnostics were heretics specifically “because they don’t confess that the Eucharist is the flesh of our Savior Jesus Christ.”¹¹ **you do not have life within you.** Here he means divine life. Drinking the blood of animals is forbidden under the Old Covenant. To do so is to consume “life” that is merely natural and of a lower order than human life. Jesus’ injunction does not fall under these prohibitions. The “life” he imparts is not natural but supernatural; it does not pull us down to the level of animals; it elevates us to become sharers in his divine nature.¹³

54 Whoever eats Our Lord uses a stronger word than just “eat,” as the original verb could be translated as “chew.”¹⁵ **my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day.** Jesus clearly states that his Body and Blood are a pledge of eternal life and a guarantee of our resurrection!¹⁵

55 For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. In the same way as bodily food is necessary for life on earth, Holy Communion is necessary for maintaining the life of the soul, which is why the Church exhorts us to receive this Sacrament frequently. St. Francis de Sales comments: “Whosoever makes use of the Sacrament of the Eucharist often with devotion so strengthens the health and the life of his soul, that it is almost impossible for him to be poisoned by any kind of evil affection. We cannot be nourished with this flesh of life and live with the affections of death. Christians who are damned will be unable to make any reply when the just Judge shows them how much they are to blame for dying spiritually since it was so easy for them to maintain themselves in life and in health by eating his Body which he had left them for this purpose. ‘Unhappy souls,’ he will say, ‘why did you die, seeing that you had at your command the fruit and the food of life?’”¹⁵

56 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him.

57 Just as the living Father sent me and I have life because of the Father so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me. We will never be able to appreciate enough the intimacy with God himself that we are offered in the Eucharistic Banquet!¹⁵

⁵⁸This is the bread that came down from heaven. Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died, whoever eats this bread will live forever.” “Will live forever” is an expression that occurs rarely in the Bible, only twice in John and once in the Greek version of Genesis. A comparison is thus implied between the Tree of Life, which bore the fruit of immortality and the Bread of Life, which tradition calls the “medicine of immortality.”¹³ For the third time (6:31-32 and 6:49) Jesus compares the true bread of life, his own Body, with the manna God used to feed the Israelites every day during their forty years in the wilderness — thereby inviting us to nourish our soul frequently with the food of his Body. St. Escriva encourages us with the following story: “Going to Communion every day for so many years! Anybody else would be a saint by now, you told me, and I...I’m always the same!” “Son, I replied, keep up your daily Communion, and think: what would I be if I had not gone!”¹⁵

Which name for this sacrament means the most to you: Holy Eucharist, Holy Communion, Blessed Sacrament, Breaking of the Bread, the Bread of Angels, the Bread from Heaven, the Holy Things, the Real Presence, the Medicine of Immortality, the Lord’s Supper or Corpus Christi?

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers:2005” by Aelred R. Rosser; (2) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers:1997” by Lawrence E. Mick, (3) “Workbook For Lectors and Gospel Readers: 1991” by Gaziano Marcheschi, (4) “The Book Of Proverbs and The Book Of Sirach” by Ernest Lussier, S.S.S., (5) “The Catechism of the Catholic Church,” (6) “St. Joseph Edition of The New American Bible,” (7) “Dictionary of the Bible” by John L. McKenzie, S.J., (8) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Letters of St. Paul to the Galatians & Ephesians” With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (9) “The Navarre Bible: Captivity Epistles,” (10) “The Letters To The Galatians And Ephesians” by William Barclay, (11) “Why Do Catholics Do That?” by Kevin Orlin Johnson, (12) “The Jerome Biblical Commentary,” (13) “The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Gospel of John,” (14) “Catholic for a Reason” The Heart of the Home: Jesus in the Eucharist by Edward P. Sri, (15) “The Navarre Bible: St. John,” (16) “The Catholic Bible Study: Gospel of St. John” by Stephen K. Ray, and (17) The St. Paul Center For Biblical Theology Online Founded By Dr. Scott Hahn.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.