

## **Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time B/2015**

The readings of this Sunday, like those of last week, talk about the divine sustenance. They show in particular the type of food that people really need in order to nourish their body and soul on the pilgrimage of life. Like last week, they invite us to long for the food that comes from God and which gives eternal life.

The first reading of the book of Proverbs speaks of the acquisition of divine Wisdom. It compares divine wisdom to a lady who has built a beautiful house and invited the guests to a dinner. It shows the type of invited guests and the fortune they will have in accepting the invitation.

What is behind this text is the idea that those who are wise have found the way to happiness. There is also the idea that there cannot be happiness without abandoning the foolish ways of life. The last idea is related to the truth that only wise men can advance in the understanding of the mystery of life that finds its origin in God.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in the Gospel as Jesus introduces himself again today, and for the third time in row, as the bread of life. First of all, Jesus affirms that he is the bread of life that came down from heaven. Then, he says that whoever eats of this bread will live forever. Finally, he declares that the bread he gives is his flesh for the life of the world.

When the Jews heard such speech, they were all shocked and quarreled about it, wondering how he could say such things. But, Jesus did not back off; on the contrary he insisted that unless they ate his flesh and drank his blood they could not have life in themselves. He also said that whoever ate of his flesh and drank his blood, he would raise him on the last day.

After that, Jesus said that his flesh was not only a true food and his blood a true drink, but whoever ate of it, would remain in him and vice versa. Then, the Gospel explained the reason why Jesus dwelt in the one eating him by referring to the fact that as he himself has life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on him will live because of him. The Gospel ends with Jesus' explanation by referring to the manna that the Jews ate and died while those who eat the bread he gives will live forever.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Today, I want to talk about the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharistic bread and wine. By saying that the bread he gives is his flesh for the life of the world or that his flesh is true food and his blood true drink, Jesus really meant it; otherwise the Jews would not be shocked and quarreling. They did so, because Jesus' language was not symbolic, but rather direct and real.

In order to understand what is going on here, we have to remember that anytime that Jesus said something and his listeners misunderstood him, he directly corrected them. We have a couple of examples to refer to on this regard. For instance in John 11, when he was talking about Lazarus as sleeping, the disciples said that if it was so, then that was fine. He directly corrected them by saying that Lazarus was dead and not sleeping.

Another example comes from his passion when he was asked if he was a King. He accepted, but at the same time he corrected by saying that his Kingdom was not of this world. However, when it was about his flesh to eat and his blood to drink, he did not correct his speech. He let the Jews take it as they understood it.

How does it come that the Jews understood it that way? In fact, according to Jewish anthropology “flesh” does not mean just muscles, but the whole person. That is the reason why they reacted violently by saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat”? They understood that Jesus did not mean only a spiritual assimilation of his message or a symbolic food, but a real “eating” of him as a meal.

All these words of Jesus will become evident at the last Supper when he will give the bread and the wine to the disciples by saying, “this is my body” and “this is my blood”... “Do this in memory of me”. In that perspective, it becomes clear that Jesus is really present in the Eucharist, otherwise it would make no sense that he can declare that “Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you do not have life in you”.

At the light of all this discussion that Jesus had with the Jews, it becomes clear to our mind that the Eucharist is the sacrament of the real presence of Jesus in our midst. It is the celebration and the actualization of the passion, the death and the resurrection of Jesus. For that reason, the Eucharist transcends all the times and all the spaces, all the epochs and all the generations, in order to be in tune with the whole world that is in search for salvation.

The Eucharist is the indwelling of Jesus in us as he dwells in his Father. It is a sharing in the divine unity that makes us conform to the image of Jesus in us. The Eucharist is an entering into communion with Jesus through which he gives us his life and heals us of our diseases and sins.

The Eucharist is the great sign of our life in Christ. When we receive the Eucharist, Jesus himself nourishes and strengthens us and binds us as a community. He offers 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.

For today’s world, bread is an additional meal and not the main course. For the time of Jesus, bread meant real sustenance. But, bread means more than physical sustenance; it points to friendship and relationship. It is a symbol of living together, especially when people share it at the same table as an opportunity to know each other and come close to one another. In that sense, the Eucharist is the space of our coming together as disciples of Jesus and as community. Let us not miss this opportunity to strengthen our relationships as we celebrate the Eucharist. May God bless you all!

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



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