



Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time August 16, 2015 B

◆ Bread of Life Discourse continued ◆ Assumption of Mary

This weekend we continue to listen to Jesus' Bread of Life Discourse. Today's first reading, from Proverbs, sets the scene. Lady Wisdom is personified as a gracious hostess preparing a feast for all who wish to come. "She has dressed her meat, mixed her wine and spread her table." The food in Lady Wisdom is instruction on God's law, following which leads to life. The invitation is to leave foolishness (Dame Folly) which leads to death, and come to Lady Wisdom's table.

The second reading fits in nicely with the above theme. Paul tells the people at Ephesus: "Keep watch over your conduct. Do not act like fools. Do not continue in ignorance but follow the ways of God." For Paul, foolish people drink too much. Wise people seek God's ways.

In today's Gospel, John presents Jesus in the role of teacher. Like Lady Wisdom, Jesus also invites us to dwell with him. Jesus is our host offering us food that leads to life. In today's section of the Bread of Life Discourse, Jesus presents himself as our Eucharistic bread. The emphasis is on 'flesh,' 'blood,' 'eating,' and 'drinking.'

Reflecting on today's readings, Fr. Denis McBride, CSSR, writes:

In the second reading, the Christians at Ephesus are encouraged to leave foolish ways behind them and live in the ways of wisdom. Instead of drugging themselves with drink, they should be filled with the Holy Spirit. Whether together or alone, they should be a people whose heart always sings praise and thanks to the Father. To live like this is to love the new life of wisdom in the Spirit.

When it comes to the Gospel of John, Jesus is the Wisdom of God in the flesh. He embodies it in his person. Jesus is the Way who, like Lady Wisdom, invites people to come and eat the bread that nourishes them for life. Jesus' dream is not only to invite people to the banquet of life but to be the banquet of life himself. His dream is to give his flesh for the life of the world. Not surprisingly, when he shares this dream with his listeners, they cannot understand how it can be.

How can Jesus' dream be reality? How can he give his flesh as real food and his blood as drink? Is this just an empty dream? Lawrence of Arabia wrote in Seven Pillars of Wisdom:

All men dream: but not equally. Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their minds wake in the day to find that it was vanity; but the dreamers of the day are dangerous men, for they may act out their dream with open eyes, to make it possible.

Jesus' dream to share himself as food for others is no vanity of the night; he acts his dream with open eyes; he makes it possible on the cross in the total giving of self. It's helpful to remember that for Jesus, the word "body" meant more than it means to us—it meant the entire person. Also, in Jesus' day, blood was regarded as the principle of life—when a person lay wounded and bleeding, the loss of blood meant the person often died. When Jesus says, "This is my body, my blood, given for you," what he is saying is, "This is the totality of my being, all that I am, all that I hope to be." This is a great summary of Jesus' message: a self-giving love that is offered without holding anything back. This is offered as the food of life.

"Do this in memory of me"

In the sacrament of the Eucharist, we draw life from the body and blood of Jesus. "Do this in memory of me." The act that we do in this assembly is the deed of memory: we not only recall Jesus, we consume his memory as the food of life. We are nourished by real food and real drink: in eating and drinking we have new life in him. We eat the Wisdom of God; it becomes part of our very being; it becomes our resource for leaving folly and living a life of wisdom.

"Do this in memory of me." These words summarize what is expected of us. It has been pointed out that the words of consecration make excellent marriage vows. When husbands and wives struggle to en flesh the words, "My body, given for you," when they struggle to reach out to each other in gentleness, in trust, in love, they are realizing in a special way, "Do this in memory of me." When we try to leave folly and break out of our selfishness, when we try to be bread broken for others,

we realize the words, “Do this in memory of me.” When that is done, the Wisdom of God takes flesh again. [Used with permission granted by Denis McBride, CSSR—Seasons of the Word.]

The following reflection is by Fr. Flor McCarthy.

The theme of today’s Gospel is exclusively Eucharistic. Absolutely central to what we believe about the Eucharist is that Christ is really and truly present there. Not physically present, but nevertheless really present. For those who believe that God is present in all things and in all places, his special presence in the Eucharist ought not to be such a big problem. Besides, we have the words of Jesus: “This is my body... This is my blood.” And the Lord cannot lie.

When we receive communion, Jesus comes to each of us personally, as though each of us was the only person in the world at that moment. A spiritual bond is forged between us and him, with the result that we are able to enter into a deeper intimacy with him than if he were physically present. We should avail of this wonderful time to grow in intimacy and friendship with the Lord.

However, we must never forget that the Jesus we receive in the Eucharist is the same Jesus who gave his life for us. The words of the consecration remind us of this: “This is my body given for you... This is my blood shed for you.” Hence, communion should evoke a spirit of sacrifice in us. To receive this food is to be reminded that, like Christ, we too must be willing to give ourselves in the service of others.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta had a rule that when a newcomer arrived to join her Order, the Missionaries of Charity, the very next day the newcomer had to go to the Home for the Dying. One day a girl came from outside India to join, so Mother Teresa said to her: “You saw with what love and care the priest touched Jesus in the Host during Mass. Now go to the Home for the Dying and do the same because it is the same Jesus you will find there in the broken bodies of our poor.”

Three hours later the newcomer came back and, with a big smile, said to her, “Mother, I have touched the body of Christ for three hours.”

“How? What did you do?” Mother Teresa asked her.

“When I arrived there,” she replied, “they brought in a man who had fallen into a drain, and been there for some time. He was covered with dirt and had several wounds. I washed him and cleaned his wounds. As I did so I knew I was touching the body of Christ.”

To be able to make this kind of connection we need the help of the Lord himself. It is above all in the Eucharist that he gives us this help. Mother Teresa put it like this:

In the Eucharist I receive the spiritual food which sustains me in all my labours. Without it I could not get through one single day or hour of my life.

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Assumption of Mary into heaven

This weekend (August 15) is the Feast of the Assumption of Mary into heaven immediately after she died—or perhaps prior to her death. The Church has not ruled out the latter. The following is an excerpt from “*Mary, the Mother of Jesus and the Mother of the Church*,” Art. 10 of my articles on the Catechism (see our website for the full article).

“A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.” (Rev 12:1)

The *Catechism* (1993) states: “*The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin is a singular participation in her Son’s Resurrection and an anticipation of the resurrection of other Christians.*” This Church dogma was defined by Pope Pius XII in 1950 in which he declared: “*Having completed the course of her earthly life, Mary was assumed body and soul to heavenly glory and exalted by the Lord as Queen over all things, so that she might be more fully conformed to her Son, the Lord of lords and conqueror of sin and death.*”

The above words mean and affirm that at the end of her life on earth, Mary experienced immediately the resurrection of the body that is promised to all faithful followers of Christ. We can say that Mary’s Assumption flows from and completes her Immaculate Conception. If Mary was preserved from original sin by the unique gift of God, then it is only fitting that when her life on earth was finished, she would be taken to heaven.

The Church reasons that it is only fitting that the body that bore the Savior of the world should not suffer decay when her life on earth was completed. Mary’s Assumption into heaven foreshadows what we all hope to experience one day.

Have a blessed week,

