

Bible Study

Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time, cycle B

Opening Prayer: (Sign of the Cross) “Holy God, we praise you for your eternal desire that we should know you as Creator and Lord, revealed to us through your Son Jesus. And we praise you for your desire that we be with you in heaven for all eternity after our life on earth is completed. Open our ears today to hear your word, our hearts to receive it, and our wills to put it into practice. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.”

Focusing Questions

1. Is there *one* food that, for you, is essential for life and happiness?
2. Define the gift of wisdom.

Commentary before the First Reading: Proverbs 9:1-6

The Book of Proverbs is a collection of wise sayings from the Hebrew culture. It is addressed to the young and spiritually immature, as well as to the mature who wish to advance in holiness. This Sunday’s First Reading is taken from a long poem that introduces the section of proverbs attributed to Solomon. Although we now connect the symbolism of this reading to our experience of Eucharist, it has a much broader purpose, urging the reader to seek spiritual wisdom which is personified as a beautiful woman.

Read the First Reading aloud.

1. Among the Hebrews the number “seven” was symbolic of perfection, of completeness. What, then, is the author saying in verse 1 if Wisdom has erected a house with 7 columns?
2. Which virtue will the person attain who seeks to dine in the company of Wisdom?
3. Notice: whose initiative brings a person to seek Wisdom?
4. How many connections or parallels can you make between the imagery of this reading and our understanding of Eucharist?
5. Wisdom, as the gift of the Holy Spirit, helps one to see things through God’s eyes, to know God’s will. How does that gift enable the other 6 gifts: understanding, knowledge, counsel (right judgment), fortitude (courage), piety (reverence), and fear of the Lord (wonder and awe in God’s presence)?

Commentary before the Second Reading: Ephesians 5:15-20

Our series of readings from Saint Paul’s letter to the Church at Ephesus continues today and the focus coincides very well with that of the First Reading. Notice that most of the sentences are in the form of commands. Saint Paul was leaving nothing to a chance interpretation. There is an urgency about this part of the letter that is echoed in the Gospel reading as well.

Read the Second Reading aloud.

1. Can you point out 3 or 4 images from the First Reading reading that carry over and are repeated in this one?
2. On what 2 things does Saint Paul say the unwise are “dining,” and filling themselves?
3. According to Saint Paul, how must we conduct ourselves when we are surrounded by the presence of evil?
4. Since Saint Paul is *not* trying to tell us that we should sing every word we speak (Thank goodness!), what IS he urging in that last sentence?
5. How realistic is it to give thanks to God “for everything,” as Saint Paul urges?

Commentary before the Gospel Reading: John 6:51-58

We continue reading from the so-called “Bread of Life Discourse” in Saint John’s Gospel, which we started 2 weeks ago. It is obvious to us that the imagery which Jesus used was going right over his listeners’ heads. For the Jews knew of other cultures that sometimes ate their enemies killed in battle. They prided themselves on having a “higher standard,” given to them by the Lord God. They would never stoop to cannibalism!

Read the Gospel Reading aloud.

1. Choose one word or phrase that speaks to you in a personal way today.
2. What is the reaction to Jesus’ statement that he will give the people his flesh to eat?
3. How does Jesus respond to this reaction? Does that puzzle you, knowing that he was a faithful Jew as well?
4. What is the double meaning of “bread that came down from heaven”? The next sentence hints at one of those meanings. What is the difference between those 2 kinds of “bread”?

5. Verse 53 does not mean to say that only those who receive the Body and Blood of Christ in Holy Communion will enter eternal life in heaven; remember that the Catholic Church teaches that all who believe in God and do their best to live as God wishes can enter eternal life in heaven (*Lumen Gentium* #16). So, what does Jesus mean?

Applying the Readings to our Daily Lives

1. How do you connect the theme of “dining at the table of wisdom in order to become wise” and the continuing Gospel dialogue about Jesus as “the bread of life”?
2. After reflecting on these 3 Scripture passages, how is wisdom different from intelligence or knowledge?
3. How does one acquire wisdom? (The readings offer suggestions.)
4. Which person of the Blessed Trinity would you say most closely resembles Wisdom? Explain your reasons.
5. Has anyone ever told you that you are wise? Do you desire to be wise in this Biblical sense?
6. Describe a situation in your life during which you feel that you are tasting the goodness of the Lord.

Closing Prayer

“Lord our God, we greatly desire what you promise. Make us one in mind and heart; help us to seek the values that will bring us lasting joy in this turbulent world. May all the attractions of the world around us serve only to steer us to the peace of your kingdom which this world does not give. Grant this through the Holy Spirit in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.” (Sign of the Cross)