

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year B

Twentieth Sunday of Ordinary Time

First reading: (Proverbs 9.1-6)

The Invitation of Wisdom

In the Old Testament, divine Wisdom is often represented as a woman (the word 'wisdom' is feminine in both Greek and Hebrew), inviting to her banquet all who are willing to come. The only qualification is to be simple and open to learning, those whom Jesus in the gospel will call 'meek and humble of heart'.

Especially after the Exile in Babylon, the Israelites realized that they could not rely on their own strength and wisdom, but must turn to God in humility and confidence. Such lowliness is a feature of the post-exilic prophets and their spirituality. It is seen to be exemplified also in the Infancy Narratives of the gospels, especially in Luke, where all the characters are poor and destitute, powerless to help themselves, and relying on the Lord's favour: the parents of John the Baptist and of Jesus, the shepherds, ancient Simon and Anna. This invitation prepares for the imagery of the messianic banquet, and in the gospels especially the meals where Jesus is seen feasting and relaxing with his often disreputable and disadvantaged friends. It prepares also for Jesus' invitations to the banquet of the Eucharist, where we are those helpless and disreputable friends

Question:

How can we acquire this divine Wisdom?

Second reading: (Ephesians 5.15-20)

Songs of the Spirit

Singing is a natural expression of joy and united harmony that has always occurred in Christianity from the very beginning, to express the joy and gratitude of Christians in the Lord. It seems that this instruction in the Letter to the Ephesians only continues and encourages the tradition.

Already in Paul's letters, there are buried a number of hymns, unlikely to have been written by him, but more probably heard and picked up by him from the different communities. They are in a style far more rhythmical and balanced than his own excited and argumentative writing. Special examples are the hymns to Christ in Philippians 2.6-11 and Colossians 1.15-20, but the letters to Timothy and Titus have several examples of snatches of hymns. There is also a snatch of a hymn immediately before this reading from Ephesians.

The earliest outside witness to the Christian liturgy, a letter from the provincial governor Pliny to the Roman Emperor, also describes the Christians meeting on a set day (presumably Sunday) to sing hymns 'to Christ as to a God' before having what he describes as a perfectly ordinary meal together (presumably the Eucharist). So, the singing of hymns has a venerable tradition in Christianity.

Question:

What is your favourite hymn, and why??

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Gospel:

(John 6.51-58)

Eating the Bread of Life

This is the last of the readings from the Bread of Life discourse. It moves on from seeing Christ as the Wisdom of God, who must be accepted and believed, to the sacrament of eating the bread of life. These correspond to the two halves of the Mass, first the service of the Word, then the Eucharistic banquet.

We are all so diet conscious nowadays that it is quite obvious that the food we eat affects us. By eating Christ, we are assimilated into him. But, just as, if I am sick, food does me no good and can even harm me, so if I eat Christ sacramentally without wanting to be moulded into him, it does me no good at all. That is why Paul complained that the Corinthians were answerable for the death of Christ.

And drinking the blood of Christ? Blood is the sign of life - if there is no blood, there is no life - and God is the Lord of life and death. So if I receive Christ's blood, I take on his life, his divine life, as the gift of God. That has alarming side-effects: it means I share Christ's life with other Christians. We all live with the same life's blood. Do I really share my life, my talents, my goods with others, knowing that I share the same bloodstream?

Question:

How do you hope to grow by receiving the Eucharist?
