

Sunday 20

A ten year old boy is waiting patiently on the street for his mother to come out of the store, and a gentleman approaches him and asks him directions to the post-office. "It's two blocks down on your right, the boy said." The man thanks him and then tells him: "I am the new pastor in town. I invite you to my church because I can show you the way to heaven." The boy looks up at the man with a squint in his eyes, pauses and then says to him; "Aw come on. You don't even know the way to the post-office."

Thank you, Helen Cybulski, for that story. It is a most appropriate story for today's readings which talk about wisdom, for wisdom has something to do with knowing where we are going. The Second Eucharistic Prayer of Reconciliation has a wonderful opening line which says: "When we were lost and could not find our way to You, You loved us more than ever." As soon as we find out that someone loves us, we are very much helped in finding our way, very much better off in knowing where we are going. And if we could only really believe what this line says, that God loves us even more when He sees that we are lost, then all our wanderings would be over.

I was talking recently to a man who has been sober for over thirty years, after having gone through a terrible struggle with alcoholism. I asked him if he went to church. He told me he was Catholic and had gone to church for some time after getting sober, but had slacked off. I mentioned the Eucharist, but he did not seem to pick up on it. Now the twelve-step program must be a wonderful program because it has helped so many people, and I know that it asks people to entrust their lives to a higher power. But if Jesus is present to us in the bread of the Eucharist, and if we receive him there in faith and trust, wouldn't that, shouldn't that, be a power which goes beyond any power that any program can give us? So it seems to me. But perhaps it is the community nature of the Twelve-Step program which helps people so much, and perhaps people don't find that in the reception of the Eucharist, even though ideally the Eucharist should make those receiving it in to the one living body of Jesus.

This is the fourth week that we have read from chapter 6 of John's Gospel, the chapter in which Jesus identifies himself as the bread of life. But today, because of the first reading, another theme also present in this chapter is highlighted, and that is the theme of Jesus being the Wisdom of God. In the Book of Proverbs, which is a collection of sayings which cover a wide field of human and divine

activity, ranging from purely secular topics to moral and religious subjects, the realities of wisdom and its opposite, folly, are presented as women who invite people into their houses to share a meal. Lady Wisdom invites people into her house with the message: “Forsake foolishness that you may live; advance in the way of understanding.” A few verses later we read that famous sentence: “The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord....” Lady Folly, on the other hand, leads her guests to the depths of the nether world. The connection with ch. 6 of John’s Gospel is that here Jesus is portrayed as God’s wisdom who is inviting us to his banquet. True, we have to change the gender. Now it is not Lady Wisdom but Lord Wisdom who invites us.

Our high altar here presents us with this theme. Here we see the Lord Jesus as the host at the Last Supper. In a way it is strange that this altar which, I believe, was installed in our church in the 1920s, has this scene, because at that time the emphasis in the Catholic understanding of the Mass was that it was the presentation in sacramental form of Jesus’ sacrifice on the Cross, and that emphasis was there because Protestant theologians, emphasizing that Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross was unique and could not be repeated, denied that the Mass was in any sense a sacrifice. It was simply a presentation of the Last Supper. Thus you might have

thought that Catholic altars would stress the cross rather than the supper. Yet there it is in stone: the Supper of the Lord. Today, I think, both Protestants and Catholics can agree that the Mass is both supper and sacrifice, for the Lord Jesus feeds us at Mass, but the bread and wine with which he feeds us is his body given for us and his blood poured out for us. That is sacrifice.

So what is the wisdom we learn at the table of Lord Wisdom? It is that we are to find our lives in seeking to do God's will, as well as we can see it in our lives, and that this doing of the Lord's will bring us to an understanding of our lives as realities which must be given away in love—or sacrifice, if you will. Like the Lord Jesus, our bodies must be broken, our blood poured out if we are to find life, if we are to find wisdom. And the breaking and pouring is not something dramatic. No, it takes place in the little things that make up our daily lives and which call us to put others before ourselves.

We return to today's second reading from Ephesians which describes this new way of life for us. What a beautiful way to live! If we live this way, we will at least know the way to the post-office, and maybe even to heaven.