

Twentieth Sunday Ordinary Time– Year B

August 18, 2018

Reflection by Father Charles Blanchard

First Reading: Proverbs 9:1-6

Psalm: 34:2-7

Second Reading: Ephesians 5:15-20

Gospel: John 6:51-58

WELCOME to this AMAZING Church; CHRIST THE GOOD SHEPHERD, where all are welcome to hear God's Word and feast; with great delight, at this Table for spiritual comfort! This maxim (i.e., standard of practice); of being open to all God's people, highlights Christ the Good Shepherd's charism!

My sisters and brothers, to get a meal nowadays is so easy. No Time is wasted on shopping for food, preparing it, setting the table, and cleaning up afterward. All you have to do is make a stop at one of the convenient fast food restaurants. Once there, you don't even actually have to enter the confines; such activities include:

- Sit in the car;
- Place an order at a small metal voice box;
- Drive a short distance around the building;
- Make your payment; and magically,
- The food is handed to you!

My sisters and brothers, when invited to a banquet, things are quite different. In such circumstance, you and I may not have to prepare the food, but you certainly have to get ourselves ready. For example, appearance is important, and so a new outfit for the evening might be most appropriate, because a banquet is usually a MEMORY MOMENT.

When invited to a banquet, you and I seldom ask about the **menu**, nor are we generally consulted about **personal preferences**. If it is a genuine banquet, then it is presumed that the food will be of high quality, expertly prepared, and appetizingly presented.

In the end, the point of many banquets is not the character or quantity of the food served, though these certainly are important. Rather, it is the

significance of the event, the importance of the host, and the status of the honored guests.

Our scripture readings today, invite us to two banquets. The first comes from ancient Israel's Wisdom tradition. Wisdom, personified as a woman, spreads out a sumptuous banquet to which she invites "**whoever is simple...the one who lacks understanding.**" Call to mind,

- The dressed meat and mixed wine that she offers is really insight and understanding, and one would be a fool to turn down her invitation;
- Still, this is an invitation to accept what is freely given; it is not a command. Nor is it a reward for those who are deserving of it; and
- Woman Wisdom seeks those who are not wise so that she can offer them the riches of wisdom that she possesses.

In John's gospel reading, you and I see that Jesus too spreads a banquet. In this part of his discourse, the bread of which he speaks is clearly Eucharistic: "For my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink."

- His body, not merely his teaching, is the true bread that came down from heaven;
- As was the case in the passage from Wisdom, this banquet is not for those who are deserving of it;
- In fact, some of those in the crowd that had gathered around him, to whom the invitation had been extended, not only refused it, but also challenged its legitimacy: "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?";
- Just as the fare of Wisdom's banquet metaphorically stood for a reality much deeper than meat and wine, so too the food that Jesus offered was much more than simple bread; and
- He offered them, and us, his flesh for the life of the world. Any one who might turn down his invitation would be more than a fool. Such a person would be rejecting life itself.

The wisdom theme is found in the second reading as well. Paul warns the people of Ephesus against foolish living and counsels wisdom. His words of warning are startling: "The days are evil." Some of the evils; against which he warned, are with us still, evils such as drunkenness and debauchery.

Though we might be inclined to overlook such behavior, it obviously presents obstacles to a life lived wisely. However, there are other evils that may not be as apparent. They may not even be considered evil. For example,

- There is the national or religious arrogance that presumes that our point of view is the only legitimate point of view;
- There is the abuse of power that denies the more vulnerable individuals or groups the self-determination that is rightfully theirs;
- There is the personal or corporate greed that deprives whole societies of the necessities of life;
- There is the glorification of violence that destroys both the victim and the perpetrator.

Paul could easily say to us as well: "The days are evil."

Despite the fact that have you and I have been invited to be enriched at Woman Wisdom's table and to be transformed by Jesus' body and blood, there are times when

- You and I prefer the fast food of a life of complacency;
- We would rather stay comfortably in our lives we have fashioned for ourselves than have to go through all of the trouble required of reform or renewal; or
- We are satisfied, perhaps, to continue in ignorance; to adopt a "woe-is-me" attitude. It has served us to this point, so "Why fix it if it ain't broke?"

Why? Because ignorance, complacency or indifference is not bliss; because we cannot long survive on the fare of foolishness or obstinacy; because whoever eats the body of the Lord and drinks his blood will live forever.

My sisters and brothers, you (e.g., new found-friends & enduring parishioners) have been invited to this sumptuous banquet today where all are welcome to hear God's word and feast at this Table where there is no partiality. Your presence here, today, confirms a profound commitment to what a good banquet looks like. A banquet where there are

- PEOPLE of patience, understanding, openness and love;
- PEOPLE who affirm dignity and wholeness; and
- PEOPLE who generously share their time, treasures and talents!

Gracias de Dios para todos; may we be nourished by Jesus' body and blood and live well today, tomorrow and beyond!

My sisters and brothers, go out of these doors and create a MEMORY MOMENT of peace, love and joy by being the hands and feet of Christ.