

TWENTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

August 19, 2018 B

Facilitator: *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask Him to help us to hear the Word He wants us to hear this week.*

Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *God, source of life, you have gifted us with the Bread of Life, your Son, Jesus Christ. May Lady Wisdom advance our understanding and appreciation of this wonderful gift. And may we, like Jesus, grow in our willingness and ability to share our lives with others, thus becoming bread for a hungry world. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Response to last week's Word: *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week. Did the Word impact your thinking and/or behavior? Did change occur and how was it?*

Facilitator: The first reading speaks about the sumptuous banquet that Lady Wisdom offers its devotees. It is a foreshadowing of the Eucharist. The Gospel shifts from God *sending* bread from heaven to Jesus *giving* bread (his Flesh and Blood) "for the life of the world." Jesus' self-giving is fulfilled on the cross and made present now in the Eucharist. Our eating his flesh and drinking his blood draw us into this same mystery of self-giving. In the second reading, Paul contrasts a life of wisdom with a life of foolishness.

Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is He wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a Word, you may want to write it down to remember.

Read the assigned Scripture readings, pausing briefly after each one. Consider reading the commentary after each reading if you have not done so prior to your meeting.

FIRST READING: Proverbs 9:1-6

We are introduced to the personified wisdom of God, sometimes called Lady Wisdom. She has built herself a perfect house with seven columns, seven being the biblical symbol for perfection. In her home, she prepares a lavish banquet of great foods and wines, and invites all to come and partake. All who come are guaranteed to "*advance in the way of understanding.*"

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 34

In selecting this wisdom Psalm (same as last week), the Church underlines the connection between this week's reading and last week's. The response "*Taste and see*" exhorts us to feast on the Lord and to advance in our understanding of his presence in our midst.

SECOND READING: Ephesians 5:15-20

Our second reading harmonizes well with the wisdom theme found in the first reading. In Wisdom literature, *folly* invites guests to a meal but only serves bread and water rather than the festive wine and meat prepared for Lady Wisdom's banquet. In light of this

contrast, Christians have to make a significant decision about which table they will dine at. How we "eat" depends upon whose invitation we choose to accept. In this reading, Paul is strongly encouraging his readers to reject the way of foolishness and to embrace the path of wisdom which seeks to discover God's will and sing his praises.

GOSPEL PROCLAMATION: John 6:51-58

As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.

A participant reads the Gospel then all pause to reflect...

As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to write down the Word you hear.

A participant reads the Gospel again then all pause to reflect...

GOSPEL COMMENTARY: John 6: 41-51

Let us now read the Gospel commentary privately.

In this latter part of his Bread of Life discourse, Jesus states that he *is* bread from heaven and those desiring eternal life must “eat his Flesh and drink his Blood.” In other words, they must participate in the Eucharist. In the previous section of this discourse, bread meant teaching and wisdom; in today’s Gospel, it is to be understood in a Eucharistic and sacramental sense. Quarreling among themselves, the people ask, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” Given their background, theirs is a valid objection. To eat the flesh of another was and is a repulsive idea. Drinking blood was and is equally shocking and forbidden by law (Gen 9:4, Lev 3:7).

Jesus intends his eating and drinking to be understood in a *Eucharistic* sense—in a way that baffles the human mind. We Catholics believe that when we partake of the host and drink from the cup at Mass, we are receiving into our being the very life of Jesus, the One who became flesh 2,000 years ago, who offered himself as a sacrificial Lamb on the hill of Calvary, and who was raised from the dead.

To make sure his listeners understand what he is saying, Jesus repeats himself *four* times. It is not enough just to partake of Jesus in and through his teaching; we must also partake of him in a sacramental, Eucharistic sense. In doing so, we experience *here and now* a taste of eternal life and a pledge of future glory.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Turn to the person next to you and share what verse in the Gospel caught your attention. Why?

Share the next questions in small groups of 2 or 3 or with the whole group.

2. What are forms of “*foolish*” thinking in our society today? What kinds of “*foolishness*” do some Christians seem to be embracing?

3. How would you go about explaining the presence of Christ in the bread and wine to someone who has no belief about this reality?

4. Have you ever lost appreciation for the Eucharist and then rediscovered its giftedness? If so, share that story. If you have not lost your appreciation for the

Eucharist, how have you grown in your appreciation for it over the years? If raised a non-Catholic, what helped you to come to believe in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist?

5. What is one thing Jesus is saying to us in this Sunday’s Gospel about how a disciple should speak or act? And what do you need to do or change to be a better disciple?

JOURNALING: *Having listened to the Word of God, let us now take some quiet moments to write down what is coming to us. What are you hearing God say to you? Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as He asks of you. Go wherever the Spirit leads you.*

RESPONDING TO THE WORD

Consider sharing with one other person how you can act on or respond to the message of this Sunday’s Gospel. Suggestion: In the coming weeks, try to be more conscious of whom you are receiving when you come to Holy Communion. As you go through the week, be also aware that this Divine Presence fills your being, calling you to share your life with others.

SHARE PRAYER RESPONSE TO GOD’S WORD:

Share a prayer, however brief on the Gospel you have just heard, discussed and journaled about. For example: *Lord, help me to keep my eyes fixed on you since you have the words of everlasting life.* Or: *Lord, when I want to grumble help me to remember all the blessings in my life.* In other words, the prayer at this time should flow from the readings. (Consider standing in a circle and hold hands.)

CONCLUDE WITH A PRAYER OF PETITION AND INTERCESSION:

Let us now share personal prayers of petition (prayers for self) and intercession (prayers for others).

Pray especially for Catholics who no longer come to Mass. Pray also for those of us who do, that we may live more fully the meaning of the Eucharist by our self-giving service to others.

CONCLUDE WITH A SONG©