

# *Gratitude Foundation*

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*“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?  
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”*

(Lk. 17:15-17)

## **The Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time—Year B**

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*“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”*

(1 Thess: 5:18)

# Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

## Reading 1

### Proverbs 9:1-6

Wisdom has built her house,  
she has set up her seven columns;  
she has dressed her meat, mixed her wine,  
yes, she has spread her table.  
She has sent out her maidens; she calls  
from the heights out over the city:  
"Let whoever is simple turn in here;  
To the one who lacks understanding, she says,  
Come, eat of my food,  
and drink of the wine I have mixed!  
Forsake foolishness that you may live;  
advance in the way of understanding."

## Responsorial Psalm

### Psalm 34:2-3, 4-5, 6-7

**R. (9a) Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.**

I will bless the LORD at all times;  
his praise shall be ever in my mouth.  
Let my soul glory in the LORD;  
the lowly will hear me and be glad.

**R. Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.**

Glorify the LORD with me,  
let us together extol his name.  
I sought the LORD, and he answered me  
and delivered me from all my fears.

**R. Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.**

Look to him that you may be radiant with joy,  
and your faces may not blush with shame.  
When the poor one called out, the LORD heard,  
and from all his distress he saved him.

**R. Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.**

## Reading 2

### Ephesians 5:15-20

Brothers and sisters:

Watch carefully how you live,  
not as foolish persons but as wise,  
making the most of the opportunity,  
because the days are evil.

Therefore, do not continue in ignorance,  
but try to understand what is the will of the Lord.

And do not get drunk on wine, in which lies debauchery,  
but be filled with the Spirit,

addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs,  
singing and playing to the Lord in your hearts,  
giving thanks always and for everything  
in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father.

## Alleluia

### John 6:56

**R. Alleluia, alleluia.**

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood  
remains in me and I in him, says the Lord.

**R. Alleluia, alleluia.**

## **Gospel**

### **John 6:51-58**

Jesus said to the crowds:

"I am the living bread that came down from heaven;  
whoever eats this bread will live forever;  
and the bread that I will give  
is my flesh for the life of the world."

The Jews quarreled among themselves, saying,

"How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

Jesus said to them,

"Amen, amen, I say to you,

unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood,  
you do not have life within you.

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood  
has eternal life,

and I will raise him on the last day.

For my flesh is true food,  
and my blood is true drink.

Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood  
remains in me and I in him.

Just as the living Father sent me  
and I have life because of the Father,  
so also the one who feeds on me  
will have life because of me.

This is the bread that came down from heaven.

Unlike your ancestors who ate and still died,  
whoever eats this bread will live forever."

# Exegesis

## Proverbs 9:1-6

Chapter 9 of *Proverbs* is entitled *The Two Banquets*. Our passage today is the invitation to the banquet provided by Lady Wisdom. Folly has also opened her doors for those who chose to enter her home. To which invitation will each of us respond? Or will we walk past both houses in indifference?

Why should we choose Lady Wisdom's banquet? "She is a tree of life to those who grasp her, and he is happy who holds her fast." (Prov 3:18). "Hold fast to instruction, never let her go; keep her for she is your life." (Prov 4:13). Wisdom reveals herself as the source of life for those who choose her.

Who is *Sophia*, Lady Wisdom? Wisdom claims superiority to all things because she existed before them. She claims that God created (*qanani*) her. Other translations could be "begot," "brought forth," or "formed." In any event she reveals herself as being present at creation, and even being the first principle of creation. Wisdom witnessed creation and even claims to be its craftsperson. The sense of artisan is found in the principal ancient versions and in Wis. 7:22-8:1.

Greek philosophy articulated the necessity of the eternal existence of the First Principle the uncreated creator, the unmoved mover. They also posited the necessity of a master divine mind that designed and ordered all of creation. They called the first principle the *Arche* and they termed the divine mind the *Logos*. St. John answers these centuries old questions in the first line of the prologue of his gospel. In the beginning (*arche*) was the Word (*Logos*), and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things came to be through Him, and without Him nothing came to be. What came to be through Him was life, ..." The Old Testament revelation of Lady Wisdom, *Sophia* seems to reveal Christ Himself, the pre-existent *Logos*, the Divine mind of God.

Our pericope today is an invitation to the banquet of Wisdom, an invitation to the banquet of Christ. The house symbolizes the school over which Wisdom presides, the banquet her teaching (Lang, *Wisdom* 90-96). The house is also the world with its pillars (cf. Job 26:11) at whose construction Wisdom was present (8:27-30) and within which she delights to live (8:31).<sup>1</sup>

## Psalm 34:2-3, 4-5, 6-7

Psalm 34 is an individual song of thanksgiving. It is titled *Thanksgiving to God Who Delivers the Just*. "Taste and see how good the Lord is." Some translations read *savor* how good the Lord is. God wants us to experience His love and goodness. The Lord is Emmanuel, God with us. In Jesus, Emmanuel, God is in solidarity with us. He is with us on this journey through life. He is not always in the wind, fire and earthquakes but in the intimate whispers and the silence of our hearts. God wants to experience, taste and savor His grace and mercy. No where on earth is the gift of God more real, more substantial, more personal than on the Altar of Sacrifice, the Eucharist.

## Ephesians 5:15-20

In conjunction with our first reading today from *Proverbs*, *Ephesians* is inviting us to live as people who choose the banquet of wisdom and reject the lure of folly. The foundational move is to discern the will of God in our lives. It is a matter of priority. All too often we seek our own will and then inform God of our plans. I know from experience this does not work. As Sister Cecil used to say that is "bass backwards." *Ephesian* says, "try to understand what is the will of the Lord." The first step in that process is to open our hearts to the Holy Spirit and then listen with our hearts. Once filled with the Holy Spirit, the Spirit will lead and guide our lives and fill us with joy and gratitude. We are all called to be Spirit filled, Spirit led and Spirit giving people.

## Exegesis (Continued)

### John 6:51-58

“The Lord God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being.” (Gen 2:7). God revealed Himself to Moses in the burning bush as being itself. To the extent that we have being we share in the life breath of God. God is the ground of our being. He is the giver and sustainer of life. Every breath that we take is dependent on God sustaining us in being. “In the beginning was the Word... and all things came into being through Him... what came into being through Him was life.” (Jn 1:1-2). Life has a source, God, and a conduit, Jesus. The chain has an order, i.e., God, Jesus, us. That chain of life was once broken by sin and death entered the world. By His Paschal Mystery, His passion, death, resurrection and ascension, Jesus restored that broken chain of life. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass makes present again the entire Paschal Mystery of Christ. His Body given up on the Cross and His Blood poured out recreates and restores that once broken chain of life and of love. Because we were once cast out by sin, we must now reenter that chain of life that flows from the Altar of Sacrifice. Jesus makes that clear, most vividly in the *Bread of Life Discourse*.

Describing the Passover experience God informs the people to take some of the blood of the lamb and apply it to the doorposts. (Ex 12:7). He also informs them that they must eat of the flesh of the lamb. (Ex 12:8). “This is a memorial feast for you, which all generations will celebrate as a perpetual institution” (Ex 12:14). At the Last Supper, the celebration of Passover with His disciples, Jesus becomes the perfect unblemished Passover Lamb. It is necessary that His blood be spilled on the Cross and shared in the chalice, and it is necessary to eat of the flesh of the Lamb; for those who do so the angel of death will pass over.

The word for eating used in verse 55, namely τρώγω, *trogein*, is even more surprisingly physical than before. Though it cannot be translated by the crude words ‘munch’ or ‘crunch’, it really has some of their realistic strength. Jesus therefore says: ‘My flesh is *true* food, and my blood is *true* drink’. *True* or *very* represent the best attested Greek reading preferable to *truly* or *indeed*. In verse 57 the effect of eating Christ’s flesh and drinking his blood portrays entering into the chain of life. St Cyril of Alexandria’s illustration from two pieces of wax melted together is classical, and St Thérèse of Lisieux gave us a living commentary on this verse when she described her first communion not as a meeting with Jesus but a *fusion*.

The discourse ends in a repetition of the comparison with manna: “This is the bread that came down from heaven. Not as (your) fathers did eat manna and *died*. He that eat (τρώγων for the fourth time—*cf.* Gk text 54, 56, 57 = Vg 55, 57, 58) this bread shall live forever.”

## Reflection

This weekend we continue to read from the famous *Bread of Life* discourse taken from the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gospel of John. I find it both an opportunity and a challenge to reflect upon the Holy Eucharist each weekend. As described so well in the Second Vatican Council documents the Eucharist is truly the *Source and the Summit* of our faith. So, while it is a challenge to preach a new and inspirational message each week, it is also a wonderful opportunity for us to grow deeper in our understanding and our faith in this profound gift of God's life to us.

I have talked often about my unwavering faith in the real presence of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist. In recent years I am seeing more clearly the presence of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the Eucharist. Jesus made it very clear, "That where I am, there is also the Father and the Holy Spirit." On the altar, God, the creator of the universe is fully present, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God is three persons, yet profoundly one, undivided in unity.

At the Last Supper Jesus prayed, "Father may they be one, as You and I are one." When we approach the altar, we are invited to enter into a common union with the Holy Trinity. When we enter into this mystery, we connect to the source of all that is and we therefore become connected to all of being that is connected to that same source, God. That is why we call this great event, Communion, i.e. common union.

In his teaching on the Holy Trinity, St. Augustine used the imagery of the Old Testament, the New Testament and the present age. He pointed to the Old Testament as the story of our Creator God. The Gospels are the accounts of the Eternal Word made flesh. The time of Pentecost is the present age, and the Gospel of the Holy Spirit is the Gospel that we are now living. Imagine that! We are a part of a Gospel that is still being written!

The readings this Sunday highlight the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that is the bond of love that makes the Father and Son one. It is the Holy Spirit that was breathed into the clay of the earth and man became a living being. It is the Holy Spirit that poured upon the Church at Pentecost. It is the Holy Spirit that comes down upon the altar at the consecration. It is the Holy Spirit that transforms the bread and wine into the body and blood, soul and divinity of Jesus. It is Holy Spirit that illumines our hearts and our minds to see with eyes of faith. It is the Holy Spirit that is the source of our hope for eternal life. The Holy Spirit is the Lord, the giver of life. We are invited to share in that life forever. Jesus said, "Behold I stand at the door (of your heart) and knock, if you open the door I will enter and dine with you." Open the door!

Yours in the Holy Spirit,



## Personal Witness

I am always riveted on the words of Jesus that the evangelists have captured for us. I have always been particularly intrigued by the words of Jesus spoken to Peter in the 16<sup>th</sup> Chapter of the Gospel of Matthew. The scene is entitled the *First Prediction of the Passion*. In reality Jesus reveals both His passion and His resurrection to the apostles for the first time. Peter, unable to get beyond the passion, responds, “God forbid, Lord! No such thing shall ever happen to You.” Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to Me. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do.” (Matt 16:23).

My initial response to that is that Peter is human so why is he supposed to think as God thinks and not as humans’ think? The Greek word that we translate as *think* is *proneo* which means to be wise or have understanding. Jesus is telling us clearly that it is possible for us as human beings to have wisdom and understanding as God does. Secondly, Jesus expects that we should gain this wisdom and understanding, to know and to think as God does.

I have shared often my own personal experiences of God throughout my life. Some of those experiences have been more dramatic than others. One of the most profound experiences occurred in my early thirties as I was really struggling and searching for something more in my life. I was strongly encouraged by a close friend to attend a Cursillo weekend retreat. I agreed to go after weeks of encouragement (harassment) on his part. One of the evenings of that retreat included a penance service. For the first time in my life, I believe that I made a perfect confession. I poured out my heart and my soul to God and begged for his forgiveness. From there I walked into the Blessed Sacrament Chapel to pray. As I knelt before the Lord, I was overwhelmed by the Holy Spirit. In a moment of Grace God melted the hardened shield that I had built around my heart and the Holy Spirit rushed in. At that moment I knew that I was a priest, that that was my true identity. Before that I had had little thoughts of becoming a priest. Life was changed in an instant. I often describe it as moving from a black and white picture to a vibrant high-definition colorful world. All the gifts and the fruits of the Holy Spirit were alive in me. I was experiencing at once love, joy and peace to a level that I had never experienced.

Perhaps the most striking phenomenon that I experienced, however, was a spiritual clarity that I had not felt possible. It was as if my faith evolved into knowledge, understanding and wisdom. I would later discover that St. Augustine referred to this gift as *divine illumination*. One of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is wisdom and understanding. I believe that this is what Jesus is talking about when He challenged Peter and us to think as God thinks and to understand as God understands.

Our readings this weekend encourage us to open our hearts to the gift of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. At the Last Supper when Jesus promised the gift of the Paraclete He talked plainly of His indwelling, abiding presence. With that presence comes the gift of wisdom and understanding. It is through this lens of spiritual clarity that we see the world through the prism of love and joy and peace. We are able to love effortlessly because it is Christ who loves through us. Our capacity for love and joy and peace and wisdom has no bounds because we are connected to the eternal source. This is what St. Paul refers to as putting on the heart and the mind of Christ. The banquet has been prepared for us, so come to the table of plenty; the fullness of life, life eternal, awaits.

