

[Readings: Proverbs 9:1-6; Psalm 34; Ephesians 5:15-20; John 6:51-58]

There's an old Hagar the Horrible cartoon in which the heavysset Viking manages to pull himself to the top of a snowy mountain. A monk-like fellow sits at the top, serenely facing the icy wind in his scant robe and bare feet. Hagar asks, "What is the secret of happiness?" The monk replies, "These four things: poverty, fasting, abstinence, and celibacy." Hagar looks concerned. Finally he asks sheepishly, "Is there anybody else up here I can talk to?"

We may well want a second opinion when wisdom speaks its truth to us. Often it says precisely what we don't want to hear; this may explain why wisdom is not routinely practiced. In the Bible, foolishness is regularly portrayed as having a superficial but popular appeal, not realizing that we are destroying ourselves when we make the wrong decisions. They take delight in displaying their own unconsidered opinions. If their mouths don't bring them to ruin, their actions most certainly will. It is no wonder that Proverbs includes the lament, "The father of a numbskull has no joy."

Meanwhile Wisdom calls aloud in the streets, issuing a sober warning and offering a welcome invitation. To come to her house is to approach the threshold of understanding. To accomplish the goal is as simple as its end: "The beginning of wisdom is, get wisdom; at the cost of all you have, get understanding." The first step to being wise is to determine that wisdom is what you're after. A psalm says that "The beginning of wisdom is the fear, awesome reverence, of the Lord."

If we are honest, some of us will admit that wisdom isn't necessarily what we're after. We want a certain freedom from care, which we suspect money and security and popularity may provide. We want to belong, and we don't want to rock the boat too much. If we have to finesse the truth or close an eye on justice once in a while to attain that relative comfort and calm, many of us are willing to do that. Wisdom sets her table, but we may have made other plans.

Such a lack of wisdom leads to horrific consequences. The news has been filled this week with reports of depravity and cover-ups and sin in our

Church. Included in today's bulletin is a letter from Archbishop Vigneron addressing the events and the news of the turmoil in our Church.

Equally disturbing, Jesus is still earnestly engaged in telling the crowds that unless they eat His flesh and drink His blood, they will not have life within them. The Greek word used here is to "gnaw" – as predators tear their victim's carcasses to pieces. The people are appalled. This is understandable. It is an outrageous idea. Those who have spent a lifetime trying not to rock the boat, those willing to blind themselves to the demands of justice do not want the kind of intimate union with Jesus that He is asking for. He offers a word to the wise: Those who share His body and blood will have eternal life given to them and will be raised on the last day. Not many are wise, and they do not glimpse the truth that is being revealed to them.

But do we? John's Gospel was written at the end of the first century, for Christians who had been sitting with the Good News for two generations. This discourse is more for the mature Christian than the first hearer: Will you remain in this vital Communion or not? Will you stay close to this table or separate yourself from the Source of Life? The Church takes several weeks of this liturgical year to savor this passage from John about the living bread, because it is at the center of our lives as Christians. John's Gospel does not tell the story of the Last Supper's "institution narrative." Eucharist is instituted right here, in the midst of the crowd, in the offer of a share in the life of Jesus. Eucharist is, in a sense, presented not to the committed circle but offered widely, the way Wisdom spreads her invitation. How many will reply?

When the clergy sex scandal first broke out back in 2002, Bishop Ken Untener of Saginaw said something profound about the reaction of the faithful who stayed in the Church in spite of the scandal.

He said, "Do you know what the biggest miracle is in all of this sin and scandal and division? The fact that you still are coming to church on Sundays!" The fact that you continue to serve the Lord with your prayer, service and material support.

If the Church was merely a human institution, it would have been destroyed centuries ago. But the Holy Spirit of Truth and Wisdom is here, in this place, in each one of you who build up the Body of Christ. And that is the greatest wisdom and miracle of all. AMEN!