

[Readings: Prov. 9:1-6; Ps. 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. 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." As Curly from the Three Stooges would say, "Why Soi-tenly! Nyuk, nyuk, nyuk!"

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 occasionally 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.

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. Does Jesus want us to be cannibals? Humans eating humans?

The concept is not so foreign. When the pagan neighbors of the Israelites conquered their enemies in battle, it was not unusual for the victors to pour the blood of their slain enemies into chalices of victory and drink their blood. The theory was that one, blood is a source of life, and two, drinking the blood of war heroes might give them additional courage in battle.

The Greek word used by Jesus is not to "eat," but 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 understand the truth that is being revealed to them. We will see next Sunday how the crowds

relate to this so-called “Good News” shared by Jesus Christ. Spoiler alert! Their response is NOT the one Jesus hoped for!

What is OUR understanding of these words of Jesus? 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 Chapter 6 of John’s Gospel, the “Bread of Life” discourse, because it is at the center of our lives as Christians. Eucharist is, in a sense, presented not to an exclusive club membership, but is offered widely, the way Wisdom spreads her invitation. How many will of you reply?

I close with this story from Fr. Dominic Grassi, a retired priest from Chicago.

This story takes place when he is a teen-ager, visiting a pastor who lived and ministered in the sleepy farming village where his dad and uncles were born. The pastor invites the young Dominic to spend a Monday with him. The day started with a drive deep into the farm fields. An old shack with smoke rising from its stack was the only building in sight. Dominic continues the story:

We stopped. I understood that he wanted me to stay in the car. He went in, and five minutes later came out with a round loaf of bread a full two feet wide. He explained to me that was his weekly loaf, while he broke off two warm pieces for us to eat. Dare I say it was heavenly? Nothing like freshly baked, warm bread!

On the way home, he explained to me that today the bread stood alone with just butter and other spreads. On Tuesday, still fresh, it would make great sandwiches. On Wednesday, chunks would be broken off to absorb gravy from sauces. Thursday it would

be cubed as part of a hearty salad. Friday, the dried pieces would be put into the vegetable soup to thicken it. Saturday, drizzled with olive oil, some would be mixed with water and fresh tomato wedges. And the remaining stale remnants would be ground into breadcrumbs to mix with grated cheese to sprinkle over Sunday pasta.

Nothing was wasted. Each day saw a new use for the bread. And a new loaf would begin the process again on Monday. Fr. Rossi concludes the story with this lesson: The Bread of Life comes to us in many different forms, but always from the same loving, nourishing source. Will you come and sit at the table of God's Wisdom in His Word that is broken open, and at the table of the Sacrament, where the bread is broken and given to us a real food, and let it form you as that country priest formed and shaped the bread in his kitchen?

AMEN!