**Homily for 20th Sunday Yr B - 19 August 2018**

**Proverbs 9:1-6; Psalm 33(34):2-3, 10-15. R.v.9; Ephesians 5:15-20; John 6:51-58.**

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today’s psalm was written by David after he had escaped death by pretending to be mad (1 Samuel 21:11). He made his escape from Abimelech (a.k.a. Achish, King of Gath) and this psalm was his heartfelt song of praise. The scholars tell us that this psalm of thanksgiving was traditionally sung at a special event called in Hebrew the ***todah*** – a thanksgiving sacrifice given by someone who had been greatly blessed by the Lord, or delivered from some dire predicament, and who wants to say thanks to God. The thankful person invites all his family and friends and offers up a sacrificial animal along with a rich variety of bread, all of which would be consumed that day. What it amounted to was a great joyous feast of thanksgiving. Indeed this psalm invites us today to join in giving thanks and blessing the Lord at all times. Like David, our humble hearts hear and are glad because we know the goodness of the Lord. We are invited here to “Taste and see the goodness of the Lord” (Ps 34:9).

St Paul also encourages us be thankful, “singing and chanting to the Lord in your hearts, so that always and everywhere you are giving thanks to God … our Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph 5:20). Why? Because even though we live in a sinful age, our lives should redeem it.

Holy Wisdom invites us today to her wonderful feast of meat and drink, with the words “Come and eat my bread, drink the wine I have prepared! Leave your folly and you will live, walk in the ways of perception” (Proverbs 9:6). She too is inviting us to a banquet of thanksgiving, but for us to enter into it we need to step away from folly and see what is really happening – to “walk in the ways of perception”.

What is it that we must perceive? What must we see? What does it mean to taste and see the goodness of the Lord? Jesus tells us in the Gospel. “I tell you most solemnly, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you will not have life in you. … He who chews on My flesh and drinks My blood lives in me and I live in Him. … whoever eats me will draw life from Me” (John 6:53-57). It is probably impossible for us to grasp just how shocking these words were to the Jews who were listening to Jesus when He spoke these words in Capernaum. Their religion demanded that they never consume blood, because the blood is the life-force of the animal. To drink an animal’s blood would be to take on that animal’s life-force. Of course they were also just as shocked as we are at the thought of cannibalism – eating the flesh of another human being.

On that day in Capernaum, when Jesus shocked His followers to the core by telling them they must eat His flesh and drink His blood, most of them, the vast majority of those who had followed breathlessly this amazing miracle worker and teacher, became irrelevant to His mission. What Jesus really needed was not multitudes of half-hearted followers, but just a few who trusted Him even when they didn’t understand Him and who would follow Him through thick and thin. The rest simply fell away. Unable to understand, they refused to believe in Him.

But we should realize that everything about Jesus’ life was shocking. The very idea of God becoming man is deeply shocking, as is the thought that God might care that much about us as to come to us in human form and even be prepared to die for us. That’s very disturbing, or it should be, if we were to think about the implications. And what Jesus says about Himself in this passage from John Ch 6 brings to a climax the shocking nature of His mission to us.

As Dr Peter Kreeft points out in his very incisive little book “Jesus Shock” we must ask ourselves why did Jesus come down from Heaven? Why did he come? He came to give us His Body to eat and His blood to drink. And why did He do that? Wouldn’t it be enough if He had just given us His mind, His teaching, His truth so that we could know Him, love Him and imitate Him? No, He tells us to eat Him, so we can be Him. There is an old saying: “You are what you eat”. Never was it more true than in relation to Jesus. As Kreeft says: “Our destiny is Christification, divinization, ***theosis*** in Greek as the Eastern Orthodox call it” (Jesus Shock p. 139). St Peter wrote that through Jesus Christ our Lord, we have been given the power to “escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4).

Jesus says to us “This is My Body given up for you” so that we can be free from the bondage of sin and death. On the other side of the argument, Satan wants us to say “This is my body, I’ll do with it what I like. God, you have no rights over me. I am the master of my own fate, and when I die I will not repent but go on singing ‘I did it My Way’ all the way to the realm of my chosen lord and model, Satan, who said the same thing many eons ago.”

So how can we respond to Jesus today as He offers Himself for us and to us? The only valid response is thanksgiving (*eucharist* in Greek) and adoration. If we believe in Him, we will fall down and adore Him. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is more present to us now here in this Mass than He was to those who listened to Him in Galilee, because since then, He has instituted the Mass and sacrificed Himself on the Cross for us. Let us give thanks to Him always and especially now at this Mass and let us adore Him.

Jesus My Lord, I believe You, I adore You, I trust You, I love You. Come to me today and make me like You.