

OT: Proverbs 9.1-6

NT: Ephesians 5.15-20

Gp: John 6.51-58

Kosher is a word we might use casually if something is correct and that is its literal meaning. However, to Jewish people this has a specific sense relating to dietary laws. We probably know that eating pork is forbidden but then too is all shellfish, only certain fish which have fins and scales are permitted. Meat and dairy cannot be mixed. This stems from an ancient concern not to cook a young animal in its mother's milk. Jews may only eat animals and birds that have been slaughtered in a special way and all the blood must be drained. Food with blood in it is deemed not to be Kosher so anything from black pudding to an egg which might have a tiny spot of blood in the yolk is not allowed.

Bearing all this in mind, here we have Jesus preaching to the Jews of his day that *'unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.'* These people followed him because he fed them with the loaves and fishes and now he drops this madness on them.

Bread coming down from heaven was just about acceptable given their history of manna in the desert but now Jesus is saying that his own flesh is the bread, the real food and not only that but they must drink his blood as well! No wonder they started to grumble and walk away. I wonder how many of us would have stayed if we had heard this teaching as they did without any of the context of the Christian faith that we now enjoy.

Why did Jesus have to make it so shocking, so contrary to the laws and rules that these people were familiar with, so far beyond acceptable thought?

Well, for one thing, this teaching was a test of faith. If Jesus had been right in so much before, if his parables made sense when he explained them, if he had a purpose to all he said and did, then this too must be important even if at first hearing it sounded like madness. And then he wanted to let us down gently, sow a seed for his followers then and now, show that being a Christian is not always easy and without pain. Just as he was rejected by many, so would his disciples through the ages experience alienation and suffering, some even to the point of death.

Finally, as Fr Steven alluded to in his sermon last week about sacrifice, Jesus was foretelling his death on the cross. The Lamb of God was to be slaughtered and all the blood drained from his body as in Kosher fashion.

The reading from the Book of Proverbs talks about Wisdom preparing a feast and it is the ones who are simple, the ones without sense who are invited. But then Wisdom says: *"Lay aside immaturity, and live, and walk in the way of insight."* So this banquet is to transform those who live without thinking to be people of knowledge and understanding.

Likewise, the reading from Ephesians warns about overindulgence, the banquet is not meant to be simply about good food and copious amounts of wine, you are called to *“Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil.”*

Each of the three readings today has a similar message for us. Look beyond what you see on the surface and open your heart to God’s teaching through the Holy Spirit. The gospel reading is not about cannibalism. Wisdom is not calling us to one big knees up. St Paul is telling the Ephesians and us that life is more than material pleasure.

If following Jesus Christ is not easy, if living with wisdom and understanding takes courage and integrity then we have something to sustain us. The Eucharist is central to our spiritual lives. We are fed and sustained by the body and blood of Christ but the gift is cloaked in bread and wine and is food for the soul and not the body.

John’s gospel does not contain an account of the Last Supper when Jesus distributed the bread and wine,

“Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.’”

For John, Chapter 6 of his gospel relays this same truth and in its starkness, it relates the challenge of Christianity and our utter dependence on the love of God and the gift of the Son. Jesus is the sacrifice of God to make amends for our sins. And in the Old Testament, sacrifices were bloody affairs but they failed to understand the nature of the one true God as the God of love who required not blood but as the psalmist says: *“The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”*

Through the sustenance of the Eucharist may our lives be transformed so that they reflect God’s love for all his people and may we live in wisdom and not as those without the benefit of Christ’s teaching.

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