

Homily
August 18, 2024
20th Sunday in Ordinary Time
22:40 – 32:17

I learned a number of things this past week during the Encore seminar that I went to. And one was thoroughly unexpected, a piece of wisdom. When you say (I was told), “I am sick.” No, you’re not. What? No. Your BODY is sick. You just happen to be a part living within that body that is sick. You are not your body.

Really? You know our culture says that’s what we are. It’s our body. Just look at all the advertisements we have. Whether it’s about food or cosmetics or pumping iron...whatever! We focus on the body, but that’s not who we are.

The body is the physical home of who we actually are. And just like the body needs to be fed, who we are needs to be well fed. Hold onto that.

Our First Reading from the Book of Proverbs, a book from which we hear only three times in the whole three-year cycle of readings. And the book is more than just pithy sayings to tickle the brain. Its purpose is to inculcate wisdom, to provide a guide for successful living.

This Biblical wisdom is for us so that we might know and act on the way things really are and the way God meant them to be. This Biblical wisdom is so that we might know the truth and do what is proper in the context of human society, of nature, even of the Cosmos. And this Biblical wisdom is that we might become the wise person who is open to accepting the directives of God’s will and learning from the experience of wise human beings over the centuries – even here, sitting next to us.

The reading we heard is actually part of a doublet: Chapter 9, verses 1 to 18. The first 6 verses, which we heard, are about Lady Wisdom. The last verses, 13 through 18, are about Dame Folly. Since we didn’t hear the latter in our reading, I’m going to read it for you, so you’ll see the contrast. Remember, Lady Wisdom is there to share and to provide a banquet.

Listen to what Dame Folly is about.

*The woman Folly is fickle. She is inane and knows nothing.
She sits at the door of her house upon a seat on the city heights
calling to passersby as they go on their straight way. She says,
“Let whomever is simple turn in here, or who lacks understanding.
For to him I say, ‘Stolen water is sweet, and bread gotten secretly
is pleasing.’” Little does that one know that the shades are there,
that the depths of the netherworld are her guests.*

Lady Wisdom, by contrast is surrounded by elegance, anxious to bring the hungry to share in the banquet she has prepared. In her house, made up of seven columns. It is the place of perfection, a reflection of the Divine.

She has prepared an elaborate meal, including wine mixed with spices. She has sent out messengers to announce her hospitality to those who could benefit from it.

Note: she is offering the food and drink of Divine teaching and virtue, not so much to those who deserve it, as to those who need it. To those without understanding. To those who up to now have known only foolishness. That does not mean that the wise are excluded. But her initial purpose is to those who do not understand and who need wisdom. And by doing so, she offers life for all who will accept her gift.

It is clear why this reading is juxtaposed to our Gospel passage from John. In the Gospel passage Christ, the Bread of Life, spoke of the Eucharist, his very own Body and Blood that is being offered to bring life to the world. Thus both passages are about **life**.

Lady Wisdom encourages her potential guest to forsake foolishness, that they might live. The wisdom that is offered is a source of life. And so is the Body and Blood of Jesus, for eating his flesh and drinking his blood brings eternal life. Indeed, Jesus says that unless we eat his flesh and drink his blood, we will not have spiritual life within us.

Both passages are also about a banquet. Do you like going to banquets? (I just heard someone say, “No.” That’s okay. *De gustibus non est disputandum*. About taste there is no argument.) But think about it. A banquet is a solemn meal. It involves community: the togetherness of host and guests. It’s not about solitary dining at one’s own personal table off to the side, amidst many others.

Those who banquet are drawn together and made one. Banquets involve richness, elegance, abundance and time. It’s clearly prepared with care. The best is brought forth. There’s more than enough to go around. And its participants linger without hurry. Banquets are not Fast Food.

Banquets promise nourishment, the sustaining and strengthening of life. It’s not just about staying physically alive. It’s about the feeding of the mind and the spirit through the interaction of guests and the wisdom shared.

Brothers and sisters, we’re God’s people. And we are called to an abundance of life through true nourishment which sustains and aids us and aids us grow. Not our bodies, but **who we are**: our mind and our spirit.

In the Word heard, broken open and prayed, our minds are nourished that we might reflect, discuss and grow more and more wise in the ways of faith lived in the world of our daily lives.

In the Bread of Life and the Cup of Salvation we make present and real what we are to eat and drink so that our spirits are nourished, as we experience the love of God we have in Christ Jesus.

We are not our body. We are much more. We are to care for the body, for it is the vessel of who we are.

I would encourage you to go then and reread the Second Reading from Ephesians. It's one of the few times when what we hear in the First Reading and the Gospel is echoed there. And note as you read it, it too is about life. Life in the Spirit and in Wisdom, leading to eternal life.