

20th SUNDAY YEAR, August 16, 2015, given at the Cathedral of St. Matthew.

Some years ago a couple of English monks thought about establishing a monastery in an Africa country. They found a bishop who welcomed them and helped them get some property near a village where there were some Catholics. When it came time to build a chapel, the local people constructed it on seven columns, likely taking their inspiration from today's reading from Proverbs: "Wisdom has built her house, she has set up her seven columns." Of the seven gifts of the Spirit of God listed by the prophet Isaiah, the first one is wisdom. (Is 11:1-3)

When Solomon succeeded his father David on the royal throne of Israel, the Lord appeared to him in a dream on a certain occasion and said: "Ask something of me and I will give it to you." The king asked for an understanding heart to judge the vast people in his domain and to distinguish right from wrong. God was pleased to grant him that gift and far more. King Solomon became famous for his wisdom. Wise as he was though about many things, he had a human flaw. He took wives from many neighboring countries and began worshiping their gods alongside the God of Israel.

There is a human wisdom that makes sound judgments about the realities of the human condition and our relationships with the world. It is garnered from learning from experience and pondering its meaning. It is passed on generation to generation in sayings like proverbs, in fairy tales and myths. In the wisdom literature of the Bible we are told over and over that the beginning of wisdom is fear of the Lord. That kind of fear is not just fright but also an open-mouth awe, an overwhelming wonder at the transcendent majesty, the omnipotence and omniscience of God.

Human wisdom is one thing. Divine wisdom is another. There is someone greater than Solomon with us who is wisdom itself. As St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, [Jesus] Christ [is] the power of God and the wisdom of God. (1 Cor 1:24) Paul reminds us that the wisdom of God is foolishness to man. "Since in God's wisdom the world did not come to know him through [human] wisdom, it pleased God to save those who believe through the absurdity of the ... gospel." The absurdity Paul is speaking of is mainly the crucifixion of Jesus. "We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and an absurdity to the Gentiles. God's folly is wiser than men, and his weakness more powerful than men." (1 Cor 21 – 25)

I think Paul's words can be applied to Jesus institution of the Eucharist as well. We just heard Jesus say plainly: "I am the living bread come down from heaven. If anyone eats this bread he shall live forever; the bread I will give is my flesh for the life of the world." He connects coming to eat and drink at his table with a promise of resurrection to life forever and with his abiding with us in this life.

When he said that, some turned away. They asked, How can he give us his flesh to eat? His blood to drink? We all know that with the breakaway from the Church at the Protestant reformation, many Christians in other denomination ceased to believe in the real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. For them the Wisdom of Jesus is in the Word of God in the Bible. They became strong in knowing the power of the Word while Catholics focused more on the grace of the sacraments, especially confession and the Mass. Hopefully the ecumenical going on will bring all of us closer together in mutual appreciation of each one's treasure from the apostolic ages.

What we believe depends on the meaning of what 'is' is in Jesus' statements: Ego sum via, veritas, et vita... Hoc est corpus meum, Hic est calix sanguinis mei. I am the truth.. This is my body. As St. Thomas says in his Eucharistic hymn ADORO TO DEVOTE, "visus, tactus, gustus in te fallitur, sed

aditu solo toto creditor. We believe in Jesus' presence in the consecrated bread and wine not by any changes in its appearances but "Credo quidquid dixit Dei Filius. Nil hoc verbo veritatis verius." I believe because the Son of God said it, and nothing is truer than this word of truth himself.

Do we believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the Son of God? One of my abbots used to say, If you can believe in the incarnation, believe that God the Son became a man, all the rest is easy. As we return to the altar for the offering of Jesus as the most acceptable sacrifice to the Father, let us accept his invitation to offer ourselves with him and receive with thanksgiving the spiritual food and drink true Wisdom has prepared for us. It is his pledge of his abiding presence and life to the full, beginning here and now. To the Father who sought us, the Son who bought us, and the Spirit who taught us be highest praise, honor, glory and obedience now and forever. AMEN