

A theme that runs through all our readings today is 'wisdom'. The spiritual life including the Christian life is a call to choose wisdom as opposed to folly in the way we live and in the way we see things. The Bible shows wisdom as something divine and that is given to human beings as a gift of God. Wisdom as the creative power of God is an important theme in the book of Proverbs from which our first reading is taken. Three gifts of God are evident in the brief passage, gifts which also emerge in today's Gospel.

Firstly, wisdom offers generous hospitality. The image of a banquet provided by God is a vivid one which appears often in scripture. God takes the initiative, offering blessing on a grand scale to all who are prepared to admit their need of God. Secondly, wisdom offers understanding. God does not want or expect simple blind obedience. Rather, through his Spirit, our minds are illuminated so that we become willing partners in his loving purposes. And thirdly, wisdom offers life. The stark choice between wisdom and folly in Proverbs is portrayed as a matter of life and death. It calls to mind the challenge in the Gospel: to make a decision for or against Jesus.

Our second reading from Ephesians also urges us to choose the wisdom of God rather than the folly of the world. Perhaps we need a little wisdom as we turn to today's Gospel reading. We continue our lengthy journey through chapter 6 of the Gospel of John. The chapter began with the story of the feeding of the multitude or the 5,000 which is found in all the Gospels.

In John's account a long discourse and dialogue follow the meal during which Jesus says, 'I am the bread of life,' and 'I am the living bread that has come down from heaven.' Jesus says that the bread that he gives for the life of the world is his own flesh. 'Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life; they live in me, and I in them.'

It is not surprising that the hearers are said to be shocked, as we might be, at first. But this is metaphorical language, or wisdom language, that John has in abundance to explain the truth and significance of Jesus Christ for the world.

The metaphors of Jesus as Bread of life and living bread, were natural for a people whose principal experience of the continuing presence of Jesus, the risen Lord, was in the Eucharist.

In his Gospel, John does not give the details of the institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper as the other Gospels do. Instead, he gives us this discourse that dominates his chapter 6, as a deep reflection on the meaning of the Eucharist. By asking us to eat and drink him, Jesus is inviting us to become participants in his life and to share in his ministry, his vision, and his sacrifice.

Participating in Christ is a joyful venture but also a very challenging one. If we are attracted by a purely spiritual kind of religion that somehow avoids the nitty-gritty aspects of life including the reality of death, then our Gospel today brings us down to earth and refuses to tolerate such escapist tendencies. At the heart of the Christian faith is the body, the flesh of Jesus given for the life of the world. Those of us who live in Christ are drawn into sharing his self-offering life and death, symbolised by broken bread and wine outpoured.

Many people have chosen to give up their lives completely for Christ rather than compromise with evil. This month marks the anniversaries of two Christian martyrs of the Second World War, Maximilian Kolbe, a Polish Franciscan priest, and Edith Stein (Teresa Benedicta of the Cross), a German Carmelite nun, whose opposition to Nazi atrocities led to their imprisonment and eventual execution in the Auschwitz death camp, almost exactly a year apart. Fr Kolbe had volunteered to take the place of a condemned man who begged to be spared because he had a wife and children. Such sacrifice was real and ultimate.

Thankfully, most of us will not have to offer our lives to such an extent, but life in Christ and sharing in his self-offering can take various forms. So, having done his eucharistic discourse in Chapter 6, John's later account of the Last Supper scene focuses on the action of Jesus washing his disciples' feet. In this way, he demonstrates that sharing his life means giving of themselves in loving service, loving one another and living sacrificially for others. It is an example for every Christian disciple in every age. Hopefully, everyone will find much joy this way of life, living more for others and less for self. Is this not the recipe for a better world? When did selfishness ever lead to happiness?

And it is not just about happiness but worthiness. The Eucharistic bread and wine are not a prize for the perfect or a reward for good behaviour. They are food for the human journey and medicine for the sick, for Jesus came not for

the healthy and the perfect but for the sick and the sinner. We come forward for Holy Communion not because we are worthy but because we are all wounded, incomplete, and somehow 'unworthy.' But here, God makes us worthy. Here, God seeks to make us whole, and hopefully holy, but certainly one with him in living lives that reflect his image and vision for human life.