

## Readings for the Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

18<sup>th</sup> August 2024

### First Reading: Proverbs 9:1-6

Wisdom has built her house;  
she has hewn her seven pillars.  
She has slaughtered her animals; she has mixed her wine;  
she has also set her table.  
She has sent out her female servants; she calls  
from the highest places in the town,  
“You who are simple, turn in here!”  
To those without sense she says,  
“Come, eat of my bread  
and drink of the wine I have mixed.  
Lay aside immaturity and live,  
and walk in the way of insight.”

### Second Reading: Ephesians 5:15-20

Be careful then how you live, not as unwise people but as wise, making the most of the time, because the days are evil. So do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

### Gospel: St John 6:51-58

Jesus said to the crowd: “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” So Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever.”

## A Reflection for the Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost

Jesus said to the crowd: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

Unsurprisingly, this statement brought forth questions, good questions: how can this be? It reminded me of a reflection on Holy Communion that I read by the theologian Professor David Martin, one of a series which he published, quite a number of years ago now, in a book called *Divinity in a Grain of Bread*. Since Bishop Mark will be preaching at both services this weekend, for this newsletter, I thought I would share with you some excerpts from David Martin's reflection entitled *The Sum of Worship*.

"At the Holy Communion, the Eucharist, the Mass – whatever you call it – people behave oddly. They kneel in a circle to receive a crumb or a wafer which (they are told) is the body of Christ, a prophet of Galilee nearly two millennia ago. While that happens, they may recite or sing a poem about a Lamb, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. That is pretty mysterious. If a visitor with no idea of the Christian religion were present you would have to explain to him that (for the believer) Jesus *was* the Lamb of God who was sacrificed, and He *is* the Lamb who is worthy to receive all honour and blessing. The Lamb, you might go on to say, is central to the Mediterranean cultures in which Christianity was born. It was seen as innocent, it was sacrificed, and it gave sustenance to the people. ...

Christians gather around ... the dying Lamb of God, and the broken Son of Man. He does not die but lives in them. ...

The anthropologist will say men are using the elements of bread and wine, flesh and blood, to talk with. This is basic sign language, this is elementary speech because it has to do with the most basic elemental things, our food and our drink and our bodies. This sign language is based on the simplest of all codes: to eat and to drink. To speak about life you eat, you drink, you absorb; and you use and offer your body. It is body language, and we all know about that.

But this is no ordinary eating and drinking, no ordinary 'body language'. These signs of life – the bread and the wine, the body and the blood – are very precious. They stand not just for any life, but for life at its most full and whole and unsullied. We know that our life is far from being full and unsullied: and now we come to share in that which is whole bread, whole wheat, pure and uncorrupted. So we bless the bread as standing for the best life, and we approach it with a purification of our hearts and our hands. ...

Having made our approach by cleansing of our hearts and perhaps also of our hands, we come to the table. Confidently we take our places as accepted members of one united family. To share a table is a seal of friendship, to be ministered to and to minister, and to meet a host. This meal is most wonderfully hosted, by the one who gives *himself* to us with his love and with his grace. Take this, with my love, '*This is my body*'; and *you* are my body. We are incorporated: taken into a fraternity of friends. This is the widest and most inclusive of all multi-national corporations: a body of men and women taking pledges of bread and wine together, who come from 'all nations and tribes and tongues'.

So *now* you may say it is all quite normal and understandable. Here is no problem. This is just the universal version of the family meal, the Lord's supper. Yet we look again at what we do and it becomes once more very strange. ...

We are broken beings with broken lives. Ours is a fractured world with a terrible split across the centre, and a wound at its heart. And this fracture can only be healed *by* a fracture, by that which is whole and perfect probing and entering into the centre of the wound until it breaks. ... It is in the brokenness of the perfect image of God that the perfect image of man is restored. ... The cost has been absorbed: 'This is my body which is given for you'.

But that is not quite the end. The moment we participate in the broken bread all the wholeness and wholesomeness passes into our own body. We are, by grace, at-one with ourselves, our fellows and Him [Christ]."