

## THE TWENTIETH SUNDAY OF THE YEAR - B

We continue this week with the fourth reading from chapter six of John's gospel on the bread of life. Jesus is very insistent that his flesh is real food and his blood real drink and that those who receive with faith will attain eternal life with God. In the first reading from the book of Proverbs we are invited to eat at the table Wisdom has prepared for us. The second reading continues with Ephesians where Paul continues his exhortation to live our new lives in Christ.

The **First Reading** is from the book of Proverbs, the most representative work of Israelite wisdom. The main part of the book is divided in two parts: 1. 'The Proverbs of Solomon' ch.10-22 and 'Some more of Solomon's proverbs' ch.25-29 to which appendices have been added. There is a prologue ch.1-9 and an epilogue ch.31.10-31 in praise of the ideal wife. King Solomon, who succeeded King David, was always thought to be the greatest sage of Israel, and according to 1 Kg.5.12, is thought to be the author of some three thousand proverbs. It is impossible to attribute any of these proverbs individually to Solomon's authorship but the collection as a whole does date from Solomon's time. The book represents several centuries of thought on the part of the sages and with post-exilic additions the whole book was probably given its definitive form in the fifth century. The teaching of the Book has been transcended by that of Christ.

The reading, 9.1-6, comes from the prologue to the book and speaks of Wisdom as a hostess. She has built herself the perfect house, symbolised by the seven pillars and she prepares a table heavy with good food. Then Wisdom sends out her maidservants, that is, those who have eaten already at her table, to invite the simple of heart, those who are prepared to eat Wisdom's bread and learn to leave foolishness behind and follow her perceptive ways, knowing where they are going. This reading parallels the gospel reading where Christ is insistent that we must eat real food and real drink from his table and so find the way to eternal life.

The **Responsorial Psalm**, Psalm 33.2-3,10-15, continues the theme of feeding following the style of Proverbs. Those who 'bless', 'praise' and 'revere' the Lord will lack nothing, it is the 'strong lions', the wicked or the rich, who will be in want and go hungry. Those who are prepared to listen and be taught will enjoy long life and prosperity, having learnt to speak honestly, do good and strive after peace.

The **Second Reading** is from Paul's letter to the Ephesians. If you have time read the whole of this wonderful letter, it's only six chapters long. The letter was written while Paul was imprisoned in Rome (61-63 A.D.) and he follows what he taught in Colossians about the subordinate place of the powers of the universe by teaching that God 'has put all things under his (Christ's) feet and made him the head of the Church which is his Body, the fullness of him who is filled, all in all.' He then deals with the continuous problem of Jew and gentile. Salvation is a gift given by God through Christ and this salvation is available equally to Jew and gentile, this shows something of the infinite wisdom of the mystery of God's inexhaustible love. In the last analysis God's plans are seen to be fulfilled in Christ, and in the Church the extension of Christ through history. This unity in Christ is incompatible with any lack of charity for their attitude to each other is the measure of their attitude to Christ in whom all are one.

Before today's reading, 5.15-20, Paul has been encouraging the Ephesians to live their new life in Christ received at baptism and this reading continues with his advice. As he did earlier in chapter before this reading he encourages his converts not to live senseless lives but to behave intelligently, recognising the will of the Lord. They should avoid over-drinking when they are together rather give 'thanks to God who is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.' The whole passage, 4.17-5.20, on our new life in Christ, needs to be read as a whole to get a clearer understanding of Paul's wonderful teaching.