

Closing Prayer

Wise and gracious God,
you spread a table before us
and nourish your people with the word of life
and the bread from heaven.

In our sharing of these holy gifts,
show us our unity in you
and give us a taste of the life to come.

We make our prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God for ever and ever.

Ordinary Time 20, Year B. ICEL. 1997²

Proper 15

(Sunday between 14 and 20 August inclusive) • Ordinary Time, week 20

Principal Service readings

Proverbs 9.1-6	The invitation of wisdom
Psalms 34.9-14	Those who seek the Lord lack nothing good
Ephesians 5.15-20	Do not get drunk, but be filled with the spirit
John 6.51-58	The bread from heaven gives eternal life

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ,
speak to our hearts in the stillness,
keep us steadfast in the foundation that cannot be shaken,
lift up our eyes to behold the vision of your glory;
and perfect our faith, now and always. Amen.

Society of Saint Francis

Gospel Reading

Eternal life through the bread that comes from heaven

Jesus said to the Jews:

⁵¹I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live for ever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.'

⁵²The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' ⁵³So 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. ⁵⁴Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; ⁵⁵for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink. ⁵⁶Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them.

⁵⁷Just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me. ⁵⁸This 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 for ever.'

John 6.51-58 NRSV¹

² *Opening Prayers : Scripture-related Collects for years A, B and C from The Sacramentary / International Commission on English in the Liturgy, 1997.*

¹ *New Revised Standard Version Bible* is copyright © 1989 Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

Comments and Questions

Wisdom and eating feature strongly in today's readings – in Proverbs we read that 'Wisdom has laid her table' (Proverbs 9.2) and then issued an invitation to eat and drink, with an exhortation to 'Lay aside immaturity, and live, and walk in the way of insight' (Proverbs 6.5-6). In his letter to the Ephesians St Paul warns against over-indulgence in drink, but exhorts his readers to be filled with the Spirit instead.

In the reading from John 6, Jesus continues to teach about himself as the living bread that comes down from heaven and gives life.

The intimacy of what Christ shares is shown in mutual indwelling, John 6.56.

The life that the Father communicates with the Son is passed to the faithful through the eucharist (v.57).

Both Judaism and early Christianity forbade the drinking of blood, a horrifying thought (see Acts 15.20,29; 21.25) so the words are not literal, but a powerful analogy.

In John's gospel the eucharistic theme is not related to the Last Supper but to the incarnation. For the Johannine community the eucharist is the continuation of the incarnation of Jesus.

Why the emphasis on eating his body and drinking his blood? Jesus is the passover lamb. The passover meal was eaten in celebration, remembrance, and obedience to God.

What was Jesus trying to teach his followers?

What was John trying to teach his community?

In what ways does this gospel challenge our community today?

When we share in the eucharist, what do we receive, and where are we led?

Quotations

1

To place oneself before what seems to be bread and to say, 'Christ is there living and true,' is pure faith. But nothing is more nourishing than pure faith, and prayer in faith is real prayer.

Carlo Carretto 1910-88

2

The Eucharist is the means whereby those who once received the Spirit in baptism are constantly renewed in the Spirit until their life's end.

Alan Richardson 1905-75

3

If we but paused for a moment to consider attentively what takes place in this Sacrament, I am sure that the thought of Christ's love for us would transform the coldness of our hearts into a fire of love and gratitude.

Bl. Angela of Foligno c.1248-1309

4

For One in such a lofty position to stoop so low is a marvel that is staggering. What sublime humility and humble sublimeness, that the Lord of the Universe, the Divine Son of God, should stoop as to hide Himself under the appearance of bread for our salvation! Behold the humble way of God, my brothers. Therefore, do not hold yourselves to be anything of yourselves, so that you may be entirely acceptable to One Who gives Himself entirely to you.

St Francis of Assisi 1181/2–1226

5

We are that same body. What is the bread actually? The Body of Christ. What do communicants become? The body of Christ. In fact, just as bread is the result of many grains, and although remaining themselves are not distinguished from one another because they are united, so we too are mutually united with Christ. We are not nourished, some from one body, others from another, but all from the same Body.

St John Chrysostom c.347-407

Related topics

For further study:

Eucharist; Prayer; Ecumenism; Wisdom