

Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B August 16, 2009

Readings: Proverbs 9:1-6; Ephesians 5:15-20; John 6:51-58

What Time Is It?

Summer is almost over and soon our students will be returning to school. And soon our religious education program will also begin a new season. Our young people, especially those preparing for Confirmation next spring, will be learning, or refreshing their knowledge of, their Catholic faith. And as I have sometimes visited their classes after Mass in past years, I know that their teachers will encourage them as they learn the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. Do you remember them? They are: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord.

The theme of this morning's readings is one of those gifts, *understanding*. And the main thing for us to remember is that it is a gift; a gift from God. It is a gift that we receive from the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, after we first have true faith in Him. St. Anselm describes theology as faith seeking understanding. Understanding is important, but first we must have faith, and then much will be revealed to us, much will be given to us. Faith comes first. In my last couple of homilies, I have tried to stress that we must first have faith and confidence in Jesus and then He will send us His Spirit so that we will understand what He wants us to do. It often seems to be against our nature. We want to understand first and then decide whether we should follow His will; whether we should believe and have faith.

But is it really against our nature to believe without understanding? We do it every day. Take a look at your watch. What time is it? Do you have faith in your watch to tell you what time it is? Why? Do you understand how a watch works, or how the time display showed up on your cell phone? How well can you grasp the concept of tiny gears meshing at just the right speeds, or electrons moving through micro circuit boards, or electromagnetic waves travelling through the air from a cell tower. Probably not very well, and yet you believe in the result; you trust the information that is provided.

Jesus said in our gospel reading this morning: ***"I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world."*** It was a statement that the Jews could not understand and they quarreled among themselves. Jesus asked them to believe without understanding first, in other words to have faith. And because of Jesus' statement about eating His flesh, many of His followers left Him; they did not have faith that was strong enough.

Do you understand how Fr. Zeke is able to turn the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ during the consecration of this Mass? If you do, please stop me after Mass and explain it to me. But hopefully, even if you can't understand the mystery of transubstantiation, you can still believe in it. I do. I have faith because Jesus said that it happens and I believe in His power to do all things, even if I don't completely understand.

Understanding is something we should all pursue, but achieving it is not accomplished by our merits and efforts. It is a gift from the Holy Spirit. Our role is to grow in faith and become properly disposed to receive the gift. St. Paul talks about this in

the second reading, in his letter to the Ephesians. He says: ***“Brothers and sisters: Watch carefully how you live, not as foolish persons but as wise, making the most of the opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore, do not continue in ignorance, but try to understand what is the will of the Lord. And do not get drunk on wine, in which lies debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and playing to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks always and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father.”***

We should not be foolish. We should not be drunk on wine and miss the opportunity to hear the Holy Spirit. But we must avoid other addictions as well that distract us and prevent us from receiving the Holy Spirit’s gift of understanding. We can also become addicted to television, to browsing the internet, to playing or watching sports, even to our work. There are many things that can interfere with our willingness to spend time in prayer with the Lord, giving thanks with a song of joy in our hearts. There are many ways in which we act foolishly and do not let the Holy Spirit speak to us.

One of the best things we can do each week to fight our foolish nature, is to do the wisest thing of all; and that is to come to Mass and receive the Body and Blood of Christ. This is foretold in the Old Testament Book of Proverbs. We heard this morning from Wisdom, the Holy Spirit: ***“Let whoever is simple turn in here; To the one who lacks understanding, she says, Come, eat of my food, and drink of the wine I have mixed! Forsake foolishness that you may live; advance in the way of understanding.”*** We advance in the way of understanding by receiving the Eucharist in faith.

Do you know what time it is; what time it is in your life? Where are you on your journey of faith? Be sure to allow some time to let God teach you about the concept of eternity, but don’t worry about learning how to build a clock.

Deacon Joe Hulway