

John, the author of the gospel that we have been following for the past three weeks is commonly thought to be the disciple John, who journeyed closely with Jesus over his three year ministry... John, the beloved disciple who rested on Jesus' heart at the last supper, John the disciple who was entrusted by Jesus at the foot of the cross to care for his mother, Mary. John, who, alone among the disciples, recognized the risen Jesus as he bid them to come ashore on the lake of Galilee with a full morning's catch of fish.

Today, John invites us to journey closely with Jesus. We pick-up the story, somewhat in the middle, in the familiar setting near the Lake of Galilee. Remember that the story is a retell for us; we know how the middle of this story advances to resolution! Not so for the Galileans gathered back then. They came, sparked by curiosity on accounts of miracles involving cures for the sick... water having been turned into wine... The crowds listen to Jesus' soothing message which does seem like food for life, bread or manna from heaven, as the prophet had foretold and, as Jesus now claimed. Jesus has fed their bodies too, miraculously, with the five loaves and two fishes that were on-hand. Could this, then, be the long-awaited messiah, the king who would set the world to rights, punishing the wicked, rewarding the just, a powerful God to fear and obey?

But then Jesus spoils the mood, confusing those gathered with this statement: "whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood dwells in me and I in them." Such radical imagery is shocking, signifying death rather than life. Jesus presses on repeating the message. We can understand the reaction of the crowd at this point in the story: "well, notwithstanding the miracles and the soothing words, what kind of messiah could this be?" "Not a strong king surely, not a king who would solve our problems, not a king worthy of our worship..."

It was only later events in the journey that would give life and meaning to Jesus' claim "whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood dwells in me and I in them." Jesus does foreshadow his death and the gift of the Eucharist that he will leave us. We are invited to think about the meaning of the Eucharist in this context. In receiving the body and blood of Christ, we are asked to share his mission. We share in the experience of His life, with all the joy and suffering that we know so well. But so too do we invite Jesus to share in the experience of our life- our joy and suffering, our struggles and victories, our family and our friends. Receiving the body and blood of Christ signifies that we are in active relationship with Jesus and with God, our creator. The Eucharist is Jesus telling us that the gift of our creation involves responsibility on our part. As author and priest Henri Nouwen says, if we share His flesh and blood, then we also share His responsibility- and we are therefore called to love and forgive one another.

And this is where wisdom enters in. If God invites us to be partners in this journey, how are we to be guided? We are advised in the first and second readings to "watch carefully how we live, not as foolish persons but as wise." We are called to "forsake foolishness and advance in the way of understanding." The foolish person in this context is understood as the one who cannot distinguish the real goods from the fake, the person who pursues shiny, easily-grasped objects or answers, instead of real treasure. Wisdom, is understood as real treasure- the ability to see the goodness of God wherever we may find it in the world. The getting of wisdom, God knows, is a process of head, heart and spirit, a journey towards

deeper understandings of where and in whom we may find God in our world today, here and now. The church is charged with this mission, and so are we, as individual members of the body of Christ.

Today is the beginning of Pride Week here in Ottawa. Here at St Joseph's we join the celebration. We do so because we see the goodness and the love of God in the face of every single person. We do so because of the past- we have been participants in foolishness- either actively or passively. For those of us marginalized by our sexual orientation or gender identity, we have been made to know shame, not by God, not by Jesus, but by people who should know better. We have internalized this shame, shattering our self-image as unique children of a loving God. We all celebrate Pride, affirming that we have come a ways closer on our journey towards wisdom- finding and seeing God in all people. We celebrate Pride because all of us can come openly and freely to the Eucharistic table- accepted, as worthy children of God, yet also expected to contribute- according to the gifts and calling with which we have been blessed.

In a few moments as we begin to prepare the gifts of bread and wine, Father Richard will call us to the Eucharistic table. I always appreciate his invitation, "come, not because the church calls you, it is Christ." We know there is much that is beautiful and much that is broken in our church. If we need to forgive or be forgiven, as surely as all of us do, let Jesus' example be our guide. Like the beloved disciple John, may we know community, may we know friendship and love, may we know Jesus, here in this place, where all are welcome.

Resources

Henri Nouwen, "Bread For the Journey", Harper Collins, 1997

Eleanore Stump, "Tasting In Order To See", 20th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Sunday Website of Saint Louis University, liturgy.slu.edu

Jean Vanier, "Drawn Into the Mystery of Jesus Through the Gospel of John", Novalis, 2004