

Sunday 19th August 2018 Fr Michael

Prov. 9. 1-6	<i>Wisdom's part in Creation & a table is set</i>
Ps 34. 9-14	<i>Fear of the Lord</i>
Eph. 5. 15-20	<i>Our behaviour</i>
John 6. 51-58	<i>The living bread - the one who eats this bread will live for ever</i>

'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.' *John 6. 58.* Words from the gospel we have just heard. It has been said that Holy Communion is the beginning of the loving union of God with his people and we might be bold enough to say that John was aware that the divine gift of the Bread of Life has its ceremonial enactment in the Christian Eucharist. Flesh and blood tell us so much of the humanity of Jesus and this flesh and blood are to be taken by us and digested, absorbed and incorporated into ourselves as believers. This is an intimate relationship, a mutual blending together of Jesus and ourselves and all those who participate throughout the world. What a powerful image, an image that conjures up the Body of Christ on earth today. An image that speaks of the 'True Vine.'

Our reading from Proverbs gives us images of a table being set - being set for drink as well as food - preparations are made by the person called Wisdom and she calls high and low to 'live and walk in the way of insight.' This way of leading one's life - of walking with insight - is a holy way. The partaking of the living bread is a part of that holy life. St Therese of Lisieux dragged herself to Mass from her sick bed saying, "What are these sufferings to me in comparison with one Holy Communion." To be part of one communion, to be united with all believers is to be united with Jesus Christ. The holy life is a call to change our behaviour - to self examination and St Paul bids us, with the Ephesians, to be careful how we live.

Paul addresses the young church in Ephesus, probably from prison in Rome. He is particularly concerned with the personal conduct of the Christian, that they may be worthy of Christ. Paul is imparting practical advice so that the Church may live up to its high calling, its 'Holy' calling. Paul always sees the Church as the body of Christ and its members as a distinct part of that body. Therefore, how individual Christians act and speak is of vital importance. In this short passage he exhorts Christ's followers to be careful how they behave. The behaviour of the individual Christian should give glory to God. Therefore each person should be sensible in everything they do and should take every opportunity to commend Christ through their way of life.

Foolishness is to be firmly avoided and, along with it, drunkenness, which can only lead to ruin! Every follower of Christ should let the Holy Spirit fill their life, guiding them on the path they should take. To that end they should devote themselves to worship and praise, through psalms and hymns and songs, and encourage each other in living the Christian life. Every day they should thank God for all that he has done through our Lord Jesus Christ. This passage is the conclusion of two chapters which encourage the Church, and by implication each and every Christian, to live up to our calling as disciples of Christ, as holy people.

And so we are here to worship God, to, "speak to each other in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and chanting in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus the Messiah."

We don't really know exactly how the first Christians sang the psalms, hymns and songs, we have some idea of the words, for Paul frequently quotes from the worship songs of his day, but as to the music – we have nothing much to go on. However, one thing is clear to me from this description and from a good guess at what it must have felt like to be one of the early believers – they were pretty happy in their worship. To sing and to dance in worship was second nature to them, not a strange occurrence to make you feel uncomfortable as it would be for most of us. You know I've never really understood the long faces that one so often finds in Anglican churches, but of course largely not in this one! We should be happy on a Sunday, to be together, to worship our God, singing songs with joy and gusto. We should return from the altar with faces smiling and radiant, as we have just been fed with the bread of life. For me, even a Sunday in Lent is joyful – yes we can think about serious issues, we can grapple with theology and study of the Bible, but above all else we should be joyful for we have everything to be thankful for. The bread of life means life eternal, that is the message of today's gospel and last week's gospel, and very possibly one of the most important tenets of our belief.

Herbert Smith has written, "It's impossible to love Holy Communion enough. It joins us to Christ, gives us his love, unites us with one another, implants resurrection life, assures us of eternal life, identifies us with the Son of God, returns us to the Father, gives us strength to overpower sin, and awakens the ardor to serve as Jesus did." Nine amazing attributes of a table set and waiting for us - that we may receive the Bread of Life.

Amen.