Spirituality
Scripture for Life
Voices of Sisters
Spirituality



Oblate Fr. Fenelon Sylfrard, right, and Deacon Hernst Bellevue elevate the Eucharist during Sunday Mass at St. Martha Church in Uniondale, New York, in 2021. (CNS/Gregory A. Shemitz)



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August 17, 2024
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In our history, we Christians have missed the mark on carrying out much (most?) of what Jesus tried to teach. In the name of Christ, a shameful number of men went crusading to destroy unbelievers. The Council of Trent found it necessary to prohibit such egregious abuses of the Eucharist as paying priest celebrants according to how long they could hold up the host for the people to adore.

In the U.S., some Christians saw it as their duty to carry out outlandish "proofs" that allowed them to put "witches" to death. In the name of freedom of religion, we have privatized our faith to the point that many feel free of responsibility to the common good, believing that all God desires is that we will each save our soul.

Worst of all, we have found ways to justify all of this by citing Scripture — selectively.

St. Paul warned the Ephesians about this kind of distorted theology, saying: "Watch carefully how you live, not as foolish persons, but as wise ... do not continue in ignorance." He said, "the days are evil."

Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 18, 2024

Proverbs 9:1-6
Psalm 34
Ephesians 5:15-20
John 6:51-58

Each of the deformations of Christianity mentioned above came from self-serving interpretations of Scripture, interpretations that employed fear and magic as well as bigoted exercises of power over others.

Today, our first reading introduces Lady Wisdom, a figure often identified with the Holy Spirit or Christ. She is making an offer to all who can hear. Interestingly, "hearing" does not refer to sound waves but to an attitude: "Let whoever is simple, turn in here ... forsake foolishness that you may live."

She offers, "Come, eat of my food and drink," the food that nourishes understanding. Of course, her prerequisite of simplicity means that people who come to her table want to move beyond their current thinking!

Lady Wisdom's offer is a prelude to Jesus' invitation to partake of the living bread: "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life."

Taking his words as cannibalistic, his listeners entirely (purposely?) misinterpreted the comparison he made between his invitation to them and his relationship with the Father. Jesus stated it clearly, "Just as the living Father sent me, and I have life because of the Father, so also the one who feeds on me will have life because of me."

Jesus was inviting them into a relationship of real mutuality with him, one that mirrored his relationship with the Father. They couldn't understand this because, as we saw last week, they wouldn't accept the idea that Jesus came from the Father.

Jesus says, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in [her/him.]"

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Obviously, this refers to much more than what we send to our stomachs. To take someone in like food is to allow that person to come to life in us. Christ invites us to give him a dwelling place in our heart, mind and psyche. As we do so, we begin to allow all that we are and do to find its source and purpose in him.

This takes us far beyond the physical act of eating. This is an open invitation to the mysticism of living through, with and in him. This banquet is too much to take in all at once.

How are we to know if we are following Paul's advice to seek the will of God rather than interpreting like the Crusaders? Wisdom told us that the "simple" would enjoy

her banquet. The simple, like the poor in spirit, not only accept, but rejoice in the awareness that they have much to learn.

The word most repeated in Wisdom and Jesus' teaching is life. In John, life is an unrestricted term. Jesus came for the life of the world. Anything done in him creates life for all. People who create or enhance life will find themselves caught up in an unlimited spiral of energy: Giving life gives them life and they are drawn into the eternal life of God.

Sometimes we accept a spirituality that reflects the situation of a beggar dressed in rags and starving, all the while sitting obliviously on a pot of gold. We settle for what poor theology and materialistic society present, failing to take in what we are really being offered.

Jesus' ministry was not about miracles done and delivered. Everything he did was a sign pointing toward what was much greater than our limited or limiting comprehension.

Instead of accepting inadequate interpretations of the Gospel, Christ invites us into an ongoing, mystical spiral of tasting and seeing the goodness of the Lord. We eat his body and drink his blood when we allow him to live in us to the point that we will keep sharing his life forever.

A version of this story appeared in the **Aug 2-15, 2024** print issue under the headline: An offer to all who can hear.