

Sermon for 19 August 2012

PROPER 15 Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost. Year B

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Solomon asked for Wisdom.

I just got back from vacation on Friday night, so this sermon may be a little ragged! We had a great time. And when you have had a great time you want it to continue. So what would I be asking for? Actually, a win on the lottery, which would enable me to go and live in that lovely part of France from which we just came back.

Solomon could have wished for military superiority, for magnificent wealth, for political stability, for the new, bigger, faster horse from Arabia.

What would you wish for right now?

Wishes are usually about making life, more exciting, easier, softer, more impressive.

The average lottery-type wish is not necessarily about a deeper or richer inner life. But, oddly, that is what Solomon wished for. He wished to be able to understand his people, his world, and perhaps himself too. He wished this so he could care for his people better. God's people.

It was a wish that could mean his life would be more about the good of others than about himself. It might mean more work and less play.

Every time we come to church we come to meet with God.

God might be waiting to hear your wish in the prayers you say during the time of worship.

Do you come to Church with a wish, a hope, a longing, a prayer request?

What do you wish for when you came to church? It is a part of the question, or even the heart of the answer to, "Why did you come to church today?"

What the Gospel has been teaching in these last weeks is about the body of Christ, the Eucharist. It is about coming into the presence of the God who gives himself to us.

I think that mostly we wish to come to Church and find a number of nice things.

We may hope to find our friends. How about a good sermon, or great music, comfy seats or a lovely building? Maybe you look for a refuge from troubles, or a time of stillness in a busy week. Perhaps church is a place to reminisce about old times. There are as many reasons as people here today.

What Jesus says in the Gospel about eating his flesh and drinking his blood is deeper. It is like asking for wisdom instead of a lottery win.

His offer is that you will find him, and that he will find you.

But you will only really do that if you let him into you, and you go into him.

Jesus says to us through these words in John's Gospel,

"I am not here for you to look at, or listen to, only. I am here to mix my self into your self. I want you to make room for my spirit to become part of who you are. I want to be in your body, and I want you to be in mine. I need your hands and arms to be there for my spirit to touch and help people. I need your lips to whisper the prayers of my heart to our Father each day. I want you to live in me and be changed by my love and grace. I don't just want your interest, I want you in your fullness. I want you to give me your all, just as I give my all for you. I give you my body. I give you my blood."

You cannot find the body unless you are prepared to become the body
And if that happens you will be the body after you leave here.

Church will not be just a nice place to retreat to, but will be the support community you turn to for your attempt at being the presence of Jesus in the course of the week. You cannot do this alone. You will need others who have discovered this transformation to understand you and teach you how to do it.

On vacation I was reading the biography of Thomas Merton. He was a great Roman Catholic Mystic who became well known in the 60's to 80's. As I read of his struggling journey to understand God in his life, and then act on this understanding I thought of these readings from John. Merton was a young man of incredible intelligence. He was a scholarly man, a party lover, a drinker, addicted to love, driven to be admired, and to win at all costs. And in the midst of this he was also seeking to grasp the God who was seeping into his life. He was an atheist, against organized religion. He was too smart to be a believer and ashamed of the growing attraction of the church in his life. He was preparing to become a monk and yet not willing to tell his friends about it.

When the Spirit of Christ is at work in you it is in the deep and private parts of your soul that it happens. It is like a secret love affair, but deeper, sweeter and more painful. It is a pull and a call. Christ is not an entertainment or an achievement, but a relationship with the depth of God's heart and the depth of yours. It is in the deep and secret places where God works. Our choice is to allow that work, and participate in it.

Participation means the transforming of our lives. In prayer, in service, in acts of love (once called charity), in behaving more closely to how we would in Jesus' presence (once called piety) and in bringing ourselves closer to how we think we should be for God (once called righteousness)

So Church becomes something we belong to and draw support from in the living of the weekly life in Christ.

And out of that comes a community that loves you, a loss of fear of poverty or illness or loneliness. Gone is the emptiness of a life without real purpose or hope. And the real needs (behind the shallow needs a lottery win might satisfy) are more than amply met. Like Solomon who asked for Wisdom instead of Goodies, we get the Real Goods along with asking for the Body and Blood of Christ to be in us, and us in him.

At the same time we will still be struggling with the surface things, still be failing and stumbling and fixated on trivialities, as Merton was. We will still fuss about hymns we don't like or the shape of the new church. But God, our God, never stops offering you his heart, and seeking yours. This is the teaching of St John, of Jesus, of the Eucharist.