

**Pentecost 11B – Proper 15B (8/16/09 – Christ: The Eternal Word of Life)**

In the Name JESUS. [Amen]

There is wisdom ... and then there is wisdom. That's one way to look at and consider our *Holy Scriptures* for today. In fact, there are – actually – **three** kinds of wisdom in view in the Word of God we have heard. **First** there is what I will call “conventional wisdom” – we might also call it “worldly wisdom.” It's what all people have – some more, some less, I suppose. It's the kind of wisdom that the Jews in our *Gospel* have – the kind that makes them begin to *dispute among themselves, saying, “How can this Man give us His Flesh to eat?”* [JN 6.52] That's conventional, worldly wisdom's way of responding to Jesus' words: *“I am the Living Bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this Bread, he will live forever. And the Bread that I will give for the life of the world is My Flesh.”* [6.51] This conventional, worldly wisdom questions Jesus' claim that He has come down from heaven – as we heard last week – since some in Capernaum apparently knew Jesus' family. This same conventional, worldly wisdom says that Jesus can't possibly give us His Flesh to eat – that He can't give us His true Body and Blood to eat and to drink in the Sacrament.

And don't think that such conventional, worldly wisdom does not makes its way into the Church. The Lutheran reformers – Dr. Martin Luther himself – had to deal with those who denied Jesus' clear words in His institution of His Holy Supper: *take, eat; this is My Body ... drink of it, all of you; this cup is New Testament in My Blood.* They said – on the basis of conventional, worldly wisdom – that Jesus could not possibly give His true Body and Blood in the Sacrament. So, according to their conventional, worldly wisdom, they interpreted Jesus' clear word *is* to mean only *represents*. After all, it just doesn't make sense to conventional wisdom that Jesus can be both in heaven and on earth ... both here and also at Christ the King and Grace and Trinity and everywhere the Sacrament is celebrated today all at the same time. **We** can't do that – be in several places simultaneously – **so Jesus can't either** (since He is Flesh and Blood ... conceived by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary ... and born in human flesh ... even if He **is** the Son of God). That's what conventional, worldly wisdom says. That's what almost all churches classified as Protestant believe and teach – what has been referred to as the “real absence” of our Savior's Body and Blood in the Sacrament of the Altar.

And to support the doctrine their conventional wisdom drove them to, they've tried to co-opt the *Gospel* text we heard today, where Jesus says: *It is the Spirit Who gives life; the flesh is no help at all* [JN 6.63] – or, as some of us have learned it in another translation: *the flesh profits nothing*. See, they say, even Jesus says so ... *the flesh profits nothing ... so Christ's Body and Blood can't be in the*

*Lord's Supper.* {That is, incidentally, one of the reasons we don't commune with a great number of church bodies – because they deny that Jesus' Body and Blood are really, truly, present in the Lord's Supper for us Christians to eat and to drink. And since Christ's Body and Blood **can't** be **both** really present **and** really absent, both views **can't possibly** be right. That difference **cannot** be reconciled ... nor can it be ignored. For our part, we will stick to Christ's clear words – reiterated by God no less than three times in the Gospels and once more in 1CORINTHIANS – the Bread **is** Christ's Body ... the Wine **is** Christ's Blood ... given and shed for the forgiveness of sins ... the same Body and Blood He gave on the Cross **for the life of the world** to win for us forgiveness, life, and salvation. }

To the Reformed we say, then: *True, mere human flesh profits nothing.* With Luther we confess: *I believe that I cannot, by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him. Yes, my mere human flesh profits nothing – I cannot choose Christ ... I cannot decide to follow Him by my flesh. But the Flesh of Christ – Jesus' Body and Blood – that is another matter altogether. For the Flesh of Christ is truly human, to be sure; but it is united to and taken into His divine nature, such that everything the Son of God does, He does in and with His Flesh. In His Flesh He fulfills the Law that I cannot. In His Flesh He suffers the temptations of the evil one without sinning – as I cannot. In His Flesh He receives the wrath of the Father against all the sins of the world – which my flesh could never do. In His Flesh He comes alive and descends into hell to proclaim His once-for-all victory over sin, death, devil, and grave. In His Flesh He has risen from the dead and ascended into heaven, where He sits at the right hand of God ... even as He is everywhere omnipresent. In His Flesh our Lord shall come again to judge the living and the dead. Yes, our mere human flesh profits nothing ... but the Flesh of Christ profits everything – for in and through it we have the fulfillment of the Law, the forgiveness of our sins, true and eternal life, and everlasting salvation.*

So this conventional, worldly wisdom is seen to be, in reality, nothing but foolishness and a lack of true understanding and insight. This conventional, worldly wisdom is folly – as 1CORINTHIANS says: ***For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their own craftiness"; and again, "The LORD knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile."*** ***Therefore let no one boast in men*** [3.19-21] ... including especially in yourself. Such as have only this conventional, worldly wisdom, our *Old Testament* calls being *simple*, saying: ***Wisdom has built Her house, She has hewn Her seven pillars. She has slaughtered Her Slaughtering; She has mixed Her wine; She has prepared Her table. She has sent out Her young women to call from the highest places in the town, "Whoever is simple, let him turn in here!" To him***

*who lacks sense She says, “Come, eat of My Bread and drink of the Wine I have mixed. Leave your simple ways, and life, and walk in the way of insight.” [PRO 9.1-6]*

In our natural, sinful flesh, we are just such *simple* people ... lacking any natural sense regarding the things of God. It is only when – and because – God comes to us in His Word and Sacraments ... in the Gospel and the waters of Holy Baptism ... in Absolution and the Supper ... that we are instructed in true wisdom, so that we even start to have *the fear of the LORD* ... which *is the beginning of wisdom* ... *and the knowledge of the Holy One* which *is insight* [PRO 9.10]. Only as God instructs us by His Holy Word ... only as the Holy Spirit teaches us by that Word ... are we made holy and righteous and wise in the sight of God. And only as we continually receive such holy instruction from the Lord are we made to *be still wiser* ... until that day when we are given and forever have perfect wisdom in heaven. This is the **second** kind of wisdom – spiritual, divine wisdom, let’s call it. This is the wisdom that comes only from the Spirit teaching us that Jesus is *the Way, the Truth, and the Life*. This is the spiritual, divine wisdom that comes with Holy-Spirit-given and Holy-Spirit-sustained faith. This is the wisdom that St. Paul is speaking about in our *Epistle* ... the wisdom that comes from walking in and by the light of Christ as children of Him Who **is** Light [EPH 5:6-21]. And notice just how Paul says this by inspiration: *for at one time you WERE darkness, but now your ARE light IN THE LORD ... walk as children of light* [5.8]. It is **not** that we have chosen to leave the darkness of our sinful, mere-worldly wisdom behind ... **but** that we have **been made to be light in the Lord** – by Him Who **IS** Wisdom Itself ... that is, by Christ and by His holy work which He accomplished **for us** in His Flesh ... and which He continues to bless us with in His Flesh.

Now this is the **third** kind of wisdom. This is the Wisdom referred to, actually, in our *Old Testament* reading for today. This may not be readily obvious. But the signs are there to point us in the right direction – especially when we bring other portions of God’s Word to bear on our passage. *Wisdom has built her house* [9.1] – Wisdom is here *personified* ... as in other places in PROVERBS. She acts. She builds, She slaughters, She sets (or prepares) Her table, She sends, She calls, She exhorts, She invites the simple – that’s us, you know... all of us ... the whole world. {Incidentally, Wisdom is a “she” only because the word is feminine both in the Hebrew and the Greek.} Now consider what Holy Scripture says elsewhere (passages I’ve included in the Bulletin under “This Day in the Life of the Church”) in 1CORINTHIANS: *[W]e preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the Power of God and the Wisdom of God.* [1.23-24] And just a few verses later: *But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, Who became for us Wisdom from God*

– *and Righteousness and Sanctification and Redemption* [1.30]. The Son of God ... the Word Who became Flesh and dwelt among us – Jesus **IS** Wisdom. Elsewhere PROVERBS speaks of Wisdom coming from the mouth of the LORD, like the spoken Word [2.6] ... of Wisdom being the means by which the LORD founded the earth and established the heavens [3.19] ... of Wisdom being better than rubies [8.11] or gold or silver [16.16] – all that man naturally desires cannot be compared with Wisdom [8.11]. **Christ** is the third kind of wisdom – He **IS** Wisdom Itself ... Who in His loving wisdom acted on our behalf ... building His House, the Church, by laying Himself as the Chief Cornerstone. Slaughtering His slaughter – that is, sacrificing Himself as the Lamb of God to take away the sins of the world ... yours and mine ... as ISAIAH says: *He was led as a lamb to the slaughter* [53.7] ... it's the same word as in verse 2 of our *Old Testament Lesson*. Setting a Table before us ... though we yet live in the world and are surrounded by enemies [PRO 9.2; PSA 23.5]. Inviting us today to *Come, eat My Bread and drink of the Wine I have mixed* [PRO 9.5] ... that is, to *eat the Flesh of the Son of Man and drink His Blood* and thus abide in Him and He in us that we might live forever, and be raised on the Last Day [JN 6.53-56] ... believing in Him and knowing the Holy One of God Who has *the words of eternal life* [6.68-69] – *Christ: The Eternal Word of Life* ... our true Wisdom.

In the Name of the FATHER and of the + SON and of the HOLY SPIRIT. [Amen]