

# SERMONS FROM ST. FRANCIS

**August 20, 2006 – Pentecost 11b**

**Texts: Proverbs 9:1-6; John 6:51-18**

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## **“Wisdom’s Bread and Wine”**

Wisdom has built her house, so says the first reading from Proverbs. Wisdom has built her house.

If you go to Turkey, to the city of Istanbul, its capital, you will behold a version of this house that wisdom built. It is the Basilica to Hagia Sophia. Hagia Sophia is feminine Greek for Holy Wisdom and there in Istanbul is this most ancient cathedral to holy wisdom.

Wisdom has built her house. What a watchword that must have been as Hagia Sophia was being built. 1500 years ago Istanbul was Constantinople, named after Emperor Constantine, the Christian capital of the Eastern Roman Empire. Today it is Turkish Istanbul and it is surrounded by Islamic and secular cultures.

So wisdom built a house. And in that house, the Basilica of Holy Wisdom, just as the Proverbs text declares, “You that are simple, turn in here! Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Live, and walk in the way of insight,” the bread and wine of Eucharist fed many with forgiveness and hope.

I know another house that wisdom has built. But this house is not of wood and stone. It was not, at first glance, very grandiose at all. This house had two legs, and two arms, a torso and a head. This house of wisdom is Jesus. And St. John, in his own way, is trying to portray this body of wisdom to us in the Gospel readings.

According to John, to be part of the faith community, to receive Holy Communion is to find wisdom for life. For the Eucharistic bread and wine is life -is Christ’s life in us. And not just any life, but a kind of eternal life.

For John, this bread and wine are indeed the gracious flesh and blood of Jesus and that’s why they give us a life that never dies, this eternal life of which he speaks. We are eating and drinking wisdom herself when we partake of this Eucharist in her house.

So Holy wisdom, *hagia sophia*, is not only built of wood and stone. Holy wisdom is the Eucharist received in any sacred place, any setting. Like manna, this Eucharist falls gently from God in heaven as we recite Jesus’ words, “Do this in remembrance of me.” And we too receive that gracious gift of God into our hands. We take and eat that new manna of Jesus’ body and blood. Sometimes, it helps us survive a little longer in our own wildernesses. At other times God gives us the grace to know it’s truly food for eternal life, a true wisdom.

How shall I speak further of this eternal life that Jesus gives us in his Eucharist? How shall I speak further of a wisdom that invites us in Christ to live and walk in the way of insight? How shall I speak of Wisdom inviting the hungry into her house?

An obvious connection is the Community Hospitality offered every Sunday morning by a dedicated band of members and friends of this congregation. And while the decision may not have been processed properly, cannot we graciously receive the call of wisdom in this compassionate ministry: "You that are simple, turn in here! Come, eat of my bread I have prepared?"

You ought to know as I walk the streets several of the homeless have come up to me and thanked me for St. Francis' kindness. We have to ask ourselves, "Why am I offended, or angered, or repulsed by this ministry?"

For my part, having been an urban pastor, in all but two of my Calls, homelessness has waxed and waned over the years. I can only imagine The Duboce Triangle has seen both better and worse. I do not believe that all the churches' meal programs keep the homeless in the neighborhood. They would remain for the most part -- only more desperately. I am not interested in getting good feelings from this ministry. I do not believe or intend to grow the congregation's membership from it -- yet it relates to our vision for justice and mercy.

I too live in the neighborhood and have to negotiate bad and sometimes unnerving situations to and from work, to and from shopping. I do not believe we are solving the root problems of homelessness and mental illness either. We are only responding to surface symptoms, hunger and rejection, just as surely as Wisdom herself did when she called out "You that are simple, turn in here! Come, eat of my bread I have prepared." A place of welcome for one hour with a meal.

There is room for improvement to the program -- there always is. We can benefit from the wisdom of your experience. But there is also wisdom in that it is being done. And perhaps the wisdom includes our having to face something in ourselves; face more squarely that the sacred scripture often portrays Jesus caring for just those troubled persons. If he did, why cannot we follow that path of compassionate wisdom? Why? Why?

I don't know why some of us cannot. I speak this morning only to encourage a dialog amongst us so that I can learn the wisdom of eternal life you will bring from your experience. Let us follow the call of wisdom.

On a different matter we ought to heed wisdom from other places. I think especially of the modern world. In the first Vatican Council our brothers in the Roman hierarchy clearly rejected core values of the modern world. Calling it "Americanism" they rejected giving any power to the laity in the administration of the Gospel and set up the parochial school system to counter the values of the public school. I question the wisdom of that because this policy has increasingly isolated that church and brought a crisis of conscience on laity and clergy alike. Catholic faith, of which Lutherans are a part, has always embraced wisdom from new cultures and new situations. Why not the modern world too?

Protestantism, especially those known as Evangelicals, has also, in my judgment, acted unwisely by exalting the Bible text above the contributions of modern science. Whole congregational worlds have been created on dubious assumptions about the sources of truth and reality. Human lives, and lately, major political decisions have been dominated by this literalistic view of the Bible. These actions tarnish the glory of the Bible's spiritual power and crush human lives. Lutherans, as part of the Protestant movement also, have gone down two separate paths. It may sound self-congratulatory, but I am glad we have chosen the wiser path of listening to both Scripture and modern science. We have nothing to fear in that.

That wisdom that is Christ bonds the feminine and the masculine in all of us. May we be receptive to the Spirit of Wisdom and act wisely with all people and the gifts they bring into Wisdom's house. Christ said, "I am the living bread. and the bread that I give for the life of the world is my flesh." We can share it.

*Amen*

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