

Homily for the 20th Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 18- 19, 2018

Readings: Proverbs 9:1-6; Ephesians 5:15-20; John 6:51-58

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Have you ever cradled a little baby in your arms, and been so enthralled that you said, “Oh, I love you so much I could just eat you up?”

That was the first image that came to mind as I reflected on this Gospel. Jesus is explaining the depth of the intimacy he wants with us. “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him.” [sic] What could be more intimate than what we eat becoming part of us?

Intimacy? With God? Are you kidding? That's a far cry from the fear of God that many of us were taught growing up, isn't it? But fear closes off the possibility of the intimacy that is clearly the invitation in our readings. Wisdom, previously portrayed as partnering with God in creation, is hospitality personified here. To accept Wisdom's invitation is to embrace the life God has designed for us. The banquet she prepares is a metaphor for the banquet of life.

And the life that God has designed for us is one of intimate friendship. While we might feel unworthy, Jesus' sacrifice laid that worry to rest. In John 15, he says, “I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing, but I call you my friends because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.” The corny old colloquialism put it this way: “I am lovable. God don't make junk!”

Friendship with God is not unlike our own human friendships. What is needed is time spent together, involving self-revelation and vulnerability. On each person's part.

Scripture abounds with stories of God's loving self-revelation and vulnerability. Isaiah 43 (“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name, you are mine.”) and John 15 (“As the Father has loved me, so

I have loved you.”) are among my favorites. In Jesus, God saved us by becoming human like us and being so vulnerable that we were able to kill him. The crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus assure us that God's offer of friendship will never be withdrawn. In awaiting our response to that offer, God is once again made vulnerable.

You and I might be tempted to think that because God knows everything, we don't need to share what's going on with us. Or perhaps we're afraid of being totally honest and vulnerable, as if God would think less of us. But friends speak of matters of the heart, no matter what. Our hopes and dreams, as well as our failings and struggles are all part of that honesty. And God wants us to share! Sometimes, we can even hear God's response.

I remember when a family member had verbally abused my children for the umpteenth time, and I was really, really angry. I went to my room, and I yelled at God. “Just once, just once, I'd like to hurt him the way he hurt my kids!” After I unloaded on God, a still small voice inside of me said, “Where do you think he learned it?” In the ensuing quiet, the anger drained away and there was a bit of compassion in its place. Then, I could address the abuse.

It really is safe to tell Jesus what we think and feel. To admit honestly the places that need healing. To open them to God's transforming love. To be naked before God, as it were, and yet confident that we are embraced and loved by God.

However, we know that Jesus can be a difficult friend. Challenging and making demands. As well as comforting and supporting us. Becoming a friend of God involves accepting all God's other friends. That's potentially everyone on the planet! For God desires full human flourishing for all God's creation. That's a stretch, isn't it? But God is patient. Growing in friendship with God is a lifelong proposition.

In the gift of the Eucharist, we have the grace and food for the journey. As St. Augustine said in his homily on the Eucharist, “See what you are. Become what you eat.”

