

Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)

August 19, 2012

*Newsweek* used to run a weekly box article called “Conventional Wisdom Watch.” Each week the feature told readers what the conventional wisdom was.

Conventional wisdom is the wisdom that *everybody* knows is true. Another phrase for conventional wisdom is common sense. Conventional wisdom backs up its authority by such phrases as: “They say.” “Everybody knows it.” “I heard.”

There’s nothing wrong with conventional wisdom, nothing wrong with common sense. But there is another side to conventional wisdom that sometimes gets us into trouble. It happens when we begin to think our common sense wisdom is the same as God’s wisdom. Over and over again in scripture, our common sense wisdom is challenged.

The truly wise people in the Bible are the ones who are open to receive a wisdom higher than their own. The fool in the Bible is the one who goes it alone on common sense, on conventional wisdom, without God’s wisdom. That’s why we hear today in the first reading: “Forsake foolishness that you may live.” That’s why we hear in the second reading today: “Do not act like fools, but like thoughtful persons.”

One of the reasons the crowd in today’s gospel story could not accept what Jesus was saying is that they were so tuned in to conventional wisdom, into what everybody knew was true. “How could he give us his flesh to eat and his blood to drink?” Conventional wisdom, common sense, even their religious tradition, went against what Jesus was saying. Eating someone’s flesh or drinking blood was strictly forbidden by the religious laws of the Israelites. Jesus was giving them a higher wisdom.

Being a follower of Jesus always means that, while we are to keep our feet on the ground and follow common sense, we are also called to accept his wisdom which often goes against what people think and say.

There have always been Christians who have not been comfortable with the fact that Jesus sweat, that he had his bad days, that he was tempted, that he was human, that he was truly like us in all things, except sin. These folks prefer a Jesus with a more “divine” look. Other people try to overemphasize his humanity.

We should keep our heads straight over this issue. Our Catholic tradition is firm that Jesus was both God and man. This is the faith we declare each Sunday Eucharist in our Creed. It is a faith that comes from a wisdom that doesn’t make common sense, but is a wisdom like that of the gospel today and challenges our conventional wisdom and brings us into a new life.

I remember a cover of *Look* magazine when I was first ordained. On it was a picture of Father James Kavanaugh who had written at that time a controversial book called *A Modern Priest Looks at His Outdated Church*. In the lead article of *Look*, there was a prediction that within twenty years or so, there would no longer be a Catholic Church. The irony is that there is still a Catholic Church, but no longer a *Look* magazine. So much for conventional wisdom!

Jesus, who was God and human, continues to challenge our conventional wisdom. Let’s follow him.

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