

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time - A

Note: Where a Scripture text is underlined in the body of this discussion, it is recommended that the reader look up and read that passage.

1st Reading - Isaiah 25:6-10a

The first twelve verses of the 25th chapter of Isaiah are psalms (songs) of thanksgiving and prayer. The first of these psalms (verses 1 through 5) is a hymn to Yahweh for safe refuge. It celebrates the victory of Yahweh as something that has already taken place. The third (the last half of verse 10 through verse 12) is a hymn about Yahweh's victory over Moab. Moab is the only enemy of Israel mentioned by name in Chapters 24 through 27. The Moabites are descendants of Moab, the eldest son of Lot, who was conceived in incest (Genesis 19:37). The land of Moab was Israel's neighbor across the Dead Sea. Moab had been a longtime adversary, being remembered for having summoned Balaam to curse Israel (Numbers 22-24) and for having oppressed Israel (Judges 3:12-20). Conquered by David, Moab regained its independence after Ahab's death.

Sandwiched between these two hymns is our first reading for today. It tells of the banquet on Mount Zion to celebrate the divine kingship.

⁶ On this mountain the LORD of hosts will provide for all peoples.

The mountain is Zion, a symbol of the heavenly Jerusalem. The imagery is of a celestial banquet as a symbol of eternal happiness.

A feast of rich food and choice wines, juicy, rich food and pure, choice wines. ⁷ On this mountain he will destroy the veil that veils all peoples, The web that is woven over all nations;

The veil of mourning, possibly the surface of the earth which covers the dead

⁸ he will destroy death forever.

A promise of everlasting life. The sentence of death (Genesis 3:19) is canceled.

The Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces; The reproach of his people he will remove from the whole earth; for the LORD has spoken. ⁹ On that day it will be said: "Behold our God, to whom we looked to save us! This is the LORD for whom we looked; let us rejoice and be glad that he has saved us!" ¹⁰ For the hand of the LORD will rest on this mountain.

2nd Reading - Philippians 4:12-14, 19-20

Today we complete our study of St. Paul's letter to the Philippians. In this reading, part of Paul's closing statements, he expresses his gratitude for the aid the Philippians have sent and for their concern toward him.

¹² I know indeed how to live in humble circumstances; I know also how to live with abundance. In every circumstance and in all things I have learned the secret of being well fed and of going hungry, of living in abundance and of being in need.

Saint Paul has learned to be independent. He did not depend on material aid. He has accepted what was sent as an expression of the Philippians' concern for him, but he doesn't seek it.

¹³ I can do all things in him who strengthens me.

This refers to the personal experiences just mentioned and has little to do with martyrdom or persecution. Christ gives to His apostle the power to endure all things for the sake of the spread of the gospel (Philippians 1:12-14).

¹⁴ Still, it was kind of you to share in my distress.

Although counter to Paul's principle, what the Philippians did was right.

¹⁹ My God will fully supply whatever you need,

Not a quid pro quo, but just as God has seen fit to support Paul with a gift from the Philippians, so also He will see fit to aid them and supply their needs.

in accord with his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

God will repay them in that which He is supremely rich; that is, glory. Glory is the divine power and presence, working the transformation of human beings into God's own likeness.

"They were artisans and paupers. They had wives, reared children and owned houses. They had given these gifts freely from their small means. There was nothing absurd in praying that such people so situated should have sufficiency and plenty. He does not ask God to make them rich or affluent. He asks only that God may 'supply their every need' – so they will not be in want but will have what they need." Saint John Chrysostom (between. A.D. 398-404), *Homilies on the Epistle to the Philippians* 16,4,19]

²⁰ To our God and Father, glory forever and ever. Amen.

Gospel - Matthew 22:1-14

Recall that Jesus is in Jerusalem for his passion. He has made His triumphal entry and has upset the religious leaders. He is speaking to them in parables about His mission and by whose authority He has been able to do what He has done and is to do. The parable we hear today summarizes the long history of God's dealings with man – a series of invitations to a life of the spirit – and portrays man's response to these invitations to share in the messianic blessings. Quite invariably men preferred a life geared to a visible and tangible reality than one which they could not experience except in the spirit. Tragically real in most of its details, this parable was pronounced in the Temple on the Wednesday of the first Holy Week, almost in the shadow of Calvary. The lesson was for the proud Pharisees, who still had not grasped the idea that they were not indispensable to God's plan of redemption for all men.

^{22:1} Jesus again in reply spoke to them [the chief priests and elders of the people] in parables,

By now Jesus' enemies are convinced that they will have to arrest Him. At this point it is surprising that Jesus continues to address them in parables when speaking of the rejection by Israel of God's many invitations. It is not yet too late for divine mercy.

saying, ² "The kingdom of heaven may be likened to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son.

The messianic kingdom was referred to in the Old Testament in terms of a wedding feast to which the Chosen People were invited (recall our first reading for today). The wedding feast was the high point of the wedding festivities and to be invited to it was a distinct honor. Failure to accept the invitation constituted a grave breach of courtesy – to the point it could even be considered a hostile act.

³ He dispatched his servants

The prophets

to summon the invited guests to the feast, but they refused to come.

The invitation is a free act of kindness – God isn't obliged to invite anyone.

⁴ A second time he sent other servants, saying, 'Tell those invited: "Behold, I have prepared my banquet, my calves and fattened cattle are killed, and everything is ready; come to the feast."'

This connotes urgency; the feast is ready.

⁵ Some ignored the invitation and went away, one to his farm, another to his business.

In effect, they denied the urgency, they become careless with the things of God. They are preoccupied with material things.

⁶ The rest laid hold of his servants, mistreated them, and killed them.

This behavior is incredible, but here it serves to reveal the perversity of those invited. For their bad conduct, they shall pay dearly; retaliation will be swift and thorough.

⁷ The king was enraged and sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city.

It's quite surprising that all the intended guests live in one city and that the king doesn't live there also. This can only be seen as a prophecy of the destruction to come to Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

⁸ Then he said to his servants, 'The feast is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy to come.'

The Jewish people and their leaders don't have the appropriate moral and spiritual response.

⁹ Go out, therefore, into the main roads and invite to the feast whomever you find.'

This was the gates and markets outside the city, where crowds gather. The people there were the outcasts of Israel, the tax collectors and people in despised trades. The accepted people conducted their business within the city walls.

¹⁰ The servants went out into the streets and gathered all they found, bad and good alike, and the hall was filled with guests.

Sinners too are invited. The Church in history is a mixture of saints and sinners. We must always remember that the Church isn't a house for saints, but a hospital for sinners.

¹¹ But when the king came in to meet the guests he saw a man there not dressed in a wedding garment.

The wedding garment for the eschatological banquet would be a converted life full of good deeds. The sinners are invited but expected to repent. A clean white garment (washed in the blood of the lamb) was the proper attire, this man has not repented. His white baptismal garment is dirty. Even though he may belong to the Church, if he doesn't repent and have the proper dispositions, he will be condemned on the day when God judges all mankind. He may have made the altar call and "accepted Jesus as his Lord and savior," but he has failed to live out that call. This is an example which shows that "once saved, always saved" doesn't work.

¹² He said to him, 'My friend, how is it that you came in here without a wedding garment?' But he was reduced to silence.

Had no excuse – had simply rejected the message and failed to repent.

¹³ Then the king said to his attendants, 'Bind his hands and feet, and cast him into the

darkness outside, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.'

The punishment is sudden and severe. It's too late now to wash the garment. The darkness is away from the light and joy of the messianic blessings. He goes to a place of rejection and misery.

¹⁴ Many are invited, but few are chosen."

These words don't conflict with God's desire that all should be saved (1 Timothy 2:4). In His love for men, Christ patiently searches even the byroads seeking the conversion of every single soul, going so far as to die on the cross so that the entrance to the heavenly banquet is opened. However, God in His infinite wisdom and love respects man's freedom: man is free to reject God's grace.

St. Charles Borromeo Catholic Church, Picayune, MS
<http://www.scborromeo.org>