

**ECHOING GOD'S WORD
IN
THE CATHOLIC COMMUNITY**

**OCTOBER 15, 2023
TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**

SCRIPTURES:

Isaiah 25:6-10

Philippians 4:12-14, 19-20

Matthew 22:1-14

The Lord will prepare a feast for everyone.

He strengthens us to do all things.

Invite to the wedding whomever you find.

SCRIPTURE BACKGROUND:

Matthew:

In Hebrew literature, the wedding feast is often used as an image of the final outcome of God's blessings for those who have been faithful to the Covenant. Abundant food, free-flowing wine, the rejoicing of the guests, intimacy with the host are all characteristics of the heavenly feast, which will mark the everlasting happiness of those who have been faithful to God.

In his commentary on the Gospel of Luke, Father Eugene LaVerdiere said that Jesus lives out the inauguration of the kingdom of God in his own eating and drinking with his disciples and even with those who were considered excluded from God's favor: sinners, tax collectors, lepers, prostitutes, etc. The *wedding feast* has already begun. The groom is here in the person of Jesus Christ. The heavenly banquet has started being celebrated here on earth.

Earlier versions of this Christian adaptation of the *wedding feast* imagery can be found in the apocryphal *Gospel of Thomas*. In this version, several groups are too busy to answer the invitation. The parable ends with the line, "Buyers and sellers will not enter the places of my Father" (Thomas 64: 12). Luke's version (Luke 14:16-24) also has a welcome extended to those who had not previously been considered fit for the kingdom, while those who expected inclusion were excluded.

In Matthew, there are some striking differences. The host has become a *king*, always a symbolic way of representing God among the Jews. The wedding feast is for the king's son, Jesus Christ, obviously. Several groups here, too, refuse the invitation. These most likely refer to the Scribes and Pharisees who refuse to acknowledge Jesus. When Jesus uttered the parable, those who finally were invited and accepted may have referred to the sinners and tax collectors, etc. By the time Matthew uses the parable in his Gospel, these probably now applied to the Gentiles who had not previously been invited but were now the very ones to accept and to be honored.

Matthew also inserts a strange item: between the refusal of the last who were meant to be included and the reaching out to those who had not been invited, the king orders the burning of their city. Scholars say that this is Matthew's way of telling the Jewish leaders of his day that their city, Jerusalem, and their Temple had both been destroyed by the Romans because of their refusal to accept Jesus!

A place at the feast could even be forfeited by someone who, although invited and allowed in, turns out not to have the right disposition. Beware! Salvation is not automatic!

Isaiah:

Jerusalem is the sacred city of God; it is built on Mount Zion, a mountain holy unto the Lord. Under King David and his successors, this mountain becomes the sign for Mount Sinai, the mountain of the Covenant between God and God's people. The prophets, including Isaiah, make few references to Sinai as the place of the encounter with God. Zion has become that place in their minds. To say that the nations will come to *this mountain* is a symbolic way of saying that the nations will come to Jerusalem which is built on Mount Zion; that is, to share in the Covenant along with the Jewish people. Israel borrowed from its northern Canaanite neighbors the notion of a *banquet or feast* as a sign of the bond between their God and themselves. For ancient peoples, who almost always lived on the edge of starvation, the banquet was a splendid symbol for the abundance and power of divine love, divine protection, and reward.

Philippians:

Paul has had his measure of suffering and of success. Yet, he tells the Church at Philippi that nothing can compare with the deep satisfaction that he has in his relationship with Jesus Christ. Whether he is sorrowing or celebrating, all that is nothing compared to the joy that he feels because of Jesus Christ. Hinduism and Buddhism teach that we will only be fully content when we have ceased desiring everything and anything. Paul says he has found his contentment in having only *one* desire: Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, he is also deeply grateful that the people at Philippi have taken care of him with their gifts when he was suffering in Thessalonica! He needs no one but Christ. However, their love and their aid have also sustained him.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What groups or categories of people today feel that they have not been called or welcomed to the fellowship of the Church? What groups in your city or town would you think might not be welcome at your services of worship? What about gay men and women? What about the divorced and remarried? What about women who have had an abortion? Do you think that, at times, the language we use to condemn sin ends up being heard as condemning the persons themselves?
2. What groups are not taken seriously in the Church today? The poor? Unemployed? Divorced? Women? Those who have been away from the worship life of the Church for a while? Do we have a "robe of acceptance" that we can throw over their shoulders and make them "count" among us? How can we design such a "garment" and truly make it a sign of welcome and of belonging?
3. What were the times in your life when you heard the invitation but were too busy or distracted to respond to the call of God? Were some of those distractions really items of sin or just of neglect? What was it that finally got your attention? Did some person reach out to you and invite you to a personal conversion? Have you done the same for someone else? What could your group, family, or parish do to reach out to those who do not feel included?

SUGGESTION FOR CHRISTIAN ACTION

Discuss and decide what your group might be able to do, as a group, to make sure that the invitation of the Lord is heard again by someone who has not yet responded.

PRAYER

Let us rejoice and be glad that He has saved us!
(Isaiah 25: 10)

CATHOLIC PASTORAL PRACTICES

The *faith* of the Catholic people is derived from the revelation of God as found in the Holy Bible. The Church lives with that word that God has entrusted to its care, reflects upon it, ponders it through the centuries, formulates it into *doctrine*, setting it forth in creeds, in pronouncements of the councils, of the popes, and of the bishops. The teaching function of the Church is called the *magisterium*, a word which simply means “teaching function.”

Church doctrine evolves and develops as the believing community encounters new ways of understanding itself and the world in which it lives. New languages are all part of new cultures that have different ways of understanding reality. The Church gains new insight into the immutable *deposit of faith* and seeks new expressions for the ancient faith. At the Council of Nicaea (325 CE), the Church found a way of expressing and clarifying what the unique relationship was between the Father and the Son within the Trinity and in Jesus Christ, now that the culture and the language had moved beyond the images given in the Bible to the use of abstract concepts and definitions. Semitic languages are satisfied with images; Greek and Latin favor definitions and abstractions. In fact, heresies had arisen in explaining who the Son was in relation to the Father. Arianism taught that the Son was subordinate to the Father. Using the language of Greek philosophy, the council was able to say that the Son was *of the same substance [homoousios]* as the Father. This concept is not in the Bible, but it is used to explain the faith that comes from the word of the Bible; the result is *doctrine* that is faithful both to the word of Scripture and to the prevailing cultural forms.

Similarly, the Middle Ages gave us new tools with which to speak of the Eucharist. This development in the culture brought the Church to a new awareness of the manner in which Christ is present in the Eucharist so that at the Council of Trent, the Church could officially adopt the terminology suggested by St. Thomas Aquinas and other medieval theologians: the concept of *transubstantiation*, a complete change of the inner substance of the bread and wine without a change in the outer appearances. Again, *doctrine* made some advances.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, the Church in its nature and government needed to be re-explained. Vatican Councils I and II found new language for the ancient faith: again, a renewal of doctrine.

The word *doctrine* simply means *teaching*. The teachings of the Church are its doctrine. There is nothing to fear in using this word. It is not threatening to my intelligence to assert that the Church, through its duly authorized teachers, the popes and the bishops, has a teaching, a body of articulations that express verbally what the community believes.

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