

**Twenty-Eighth
Sunday
in Ordinary
Time**

Year A



FIRST READING
Isaiah 25:6–10

PSALM
Psalm 23:1–6

SECOND READING
Philippians 4:12–14, 19–20

GOSPEL
Matthew 22:1–14

*Scripture quotations from
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PRAYER

Psalm 23:1–6

The LORD is my shepherd,
I shall not want.
He makes me lie down
in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;
he restores my soul.
He leads me in right paths
for his name's sake.
Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil;
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff—
they comfort me.
You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
Surely goodness and mercy
shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell
in the house of the Lord
my whole life long.

**READING
THE WORD**

First Reading
Isaiah 25:6–10

On this mountain the Lord of
hosts will make for all peoples

a feast of rich food, a feast of
well-aged wines,
of rich food filled with marrow,
of well-aged wines strained clear.
And he will destroy on this
mountain
the shroud that is cast over all
peoples,
the sheet that is spread over all
nations;
he will swallow up death forever.
Then the Lord God will wipe
away the tears from all faces,
and the disgrace of his people he
will take away from all the earth,
for the Lord has spoken.
It will be said on that day,
Lo, this is our God; we have wait-
ed for him, so that he might save us.
This is the Lord for whom we
have waited;
let us be glad and rejoice in his
salvation.
For the hand of the Lord will rest
on this mountain.

Second Reading
Philippians 4:12–14, 19–20

I know what it is to have little,
and I know what it is to have
plenty. In any and all circum-
stances I have learned the secret
of being well-fed and of going
hungry, of having plenty and of
being in need. I can do all things
through him who strengthens

me. In any case, it was kind of
you to share my distress.
And my God will fully satisfy
every need of yours according
to his riches in glory in Christ
Jesus. To our God and Father be
glory forever and ever. Amen.

Gospel
Matthew 22:1–14

Once more Jesus spoke to them
in parables, saying: “The king-
dom of heaven may be com-
pared to a king who gave a wed-
ding banquet for his son. He
sent his slaves to call those who
had been invited to the wed-
ding banquet, but they would
not come. Again he sent other
slaves, saying, ‘Tell those who
have been invited: Look, I have
prepared my dinner, my oxen
and my fat calves have been
slaughtered, and everything is
ready; come to the wedding ban-
quet.’ But they made light of it
and went away, one to his farm,
another to his business, while
the rest seized his slaves, mis-
treated them, and killed them.
The king was enraged. He sent
his troops, destroyed those mur-
derers, and burned their city.
Then he said to his slaves, ‘The
wedding is ready, but those in-
vited were not worthy. Go there-

fore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.' Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests. "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?' And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind his hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' For many are called, but few are chosen.

HEARING THE WORD

"The Divine Invitation"

Over the past two Sundays we have reflected on the themes of "our glory" and "sour grapes". The liturgy of this Sunday calls us to reflect on the closely related theme of the divine invitation and our response to it.

The first reading paints a picture of a splendid eschatological future which God has prepared for all humanity to experience. The word "eschatological" refers to the future world, which God will establish after Christ's second coming. In the words of Isaiah, this future will be like a splendid banquet with abundance of food and drink, where humanity will no longer experience any insufficiency or lack of sustenance. Isaiah envisions this future as offered to "all peoples". No

one will be excluded from participation in this renewed world where human differences and distinctions, such as ethnicity, will be irrelevant. This new order will involve destruction of what we find most difficult, unwanted and terrifying - death and suffering, as God will "swallow death up forever" and "wipe away the tears from all faces". This banquet will be set "on the mountain", which indicates that the natural world will also participate in this grand renewal.

Preparation of this divine feast means God's victory over all which, in the present world, makes such harmony, peace and contentment impossible. The Lord God is described by Isaiah as the "Lord of hosts", which describes God as the leader of the heavenly army who "destroys the shroud cast over all peoples". Through this symbolic, military language, the prophet refers to what we know as "salvation". Salvation means that state of life which God had intended for humanity right from the beginning of creation, the life of harmony and well-being which people long for while journeying through this world. Formulating this splendid vision, Isaiah hands his readers "an invitation card", informing them about their future, about "the banquet" to which they are invited.

Closing his letter to the Philippians Paul referred to the conditions of his ministry. He had been in "distress". Thus, he alluded to a great variety of expe-

riences he had undergone, ranging from the joy and exaltation of apostolic success, to imprisonments and numerous threats of death. In fact, when writing the letter, Paul was in prison faced with the possibility of execution. Reflecting on his life, the apostle stated that he learned to adapt himself to every condition and endure every kind of opposition. The secret to such adaptability lies in his life-focus. He famously stated that "I can do all things through him who strengthens me". His powers of adaptability and endurance did not come from himself but from God, who called him to serve as the apostle to the Gentiles. Therefore, the matter of having or not having his physical needs met became secondary to the primary focus of his life, that of carrying on with his God-given mission. He expressed his deep gratitude to the Philippians for helping him with the material provisions he needs to carry out his work. He also called their attention to the fact that through helping him, they themselves participated in God's mission (cf. Phil 4:10-12, 15-18). Such participation guarantees that God would, in turn, provide them with all that they need in order to serve God as well. Paul ended this section of the letter with "the doxology" - a prayer of giving God glory and thanks for what God has accomplished.

Like Isaiah, Paul acknowledged that, in his present condition, he experienced insufficiency and distress. Yet, thanks to seeing "the

bigger picture” and recognizing that ultimately the Christian journey through life is a journey towards God’s glory and salvation, he was able to rise above daily concerns and not be dominated by them. Even in prison, Paul focused on the great opportunity, and invitation, he and the Philippians had been handed by God, by virtue of their invitation to serve God as Christians.

In the Gospel, Jesus tells yet another parable, the third in three successive Sundays, which takes a direct swipe at the chief priests and elders for their rejection of him. This time, the parable uses the story of a wedding banquet given by a king for his son. Many were invited to this feast, but, shockingly, they not only rejected the invitation but even killed some of king’s servants. To reject the king’s invitation is an insult, killing his servants is an act of open rebellion. Undoubtedly, Jesus applied this parable to his own life when he, the king’s son, was rejected by the leaders, while some of God’s servants – the OT prophets and Christian evangelizers proclaiming Jesus as God’s son – were mistreated and even executed. Those to whom the invitation was initially issued were undoubtedly good people worthy of such honor. Yet, their own response to it made them unworthy in the end. Their indifference to the king’s invitation and preoccupation with their own affairs led them to be excluded from the feast. Subsequently, their mistreatment of the king’s servants came as the

most drastic expression of their rejection of the king and his son.

In contrast to those initially invited, those eventually brought into the feast came from a variety of backgrounds, from “the streets”, being both “good and bad”. There were no preconditions for their welcome. However, they differed from the original group in that they accepted the invitation. More importantly, they must have taken the invitation seriously since, with exception of one man, they wore appropriate clothing. There was only one man who did not put on a proper wedding robe. Many interpreters struggle to understand who the man without a wedding robe represents. In the context of the parable, it seems most likely that this was a participant who accepted the invitation, but then did not take it seriously. He serves as the illustration of what it means that “many are called, but few are chosen”. Stating this, Jesus sums up the parable. He, the king’s son, came with an open invitation to everybody, regardless of who and where they are in life – many are called. Yet, it is only those who respond to this invitation adequately who will be able to enter the eschatological kingdom of God at the end of time.

The liturgy of this Sunday makes us aware of the universal invitation to experience God’s salvation in the renewed world at the end of time, so powerfully described by Isaiah. Yet, the response to this invitation takes place already in this

life. St Paul and Jesus emphasize that the needed response to God’s invitation is rising above daily concerns and living lives with full awareness of God’s greater purposes for the world and humanity. Such awareness allows the Christian to prepare adequately for eternal destiny by welcoming Jesus and living according to his teaching. In this way, a person becomes both “called and chosen”. Those called and chosen can then joyfully sing with the Psalmist, thinking about their eternal destiny: “the Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.”

LISTENING TO THE WORD OF GOD

We routinely receive invitations of all kinds from people close to us such as family, friends and colleagues, or from institutions such as companies or organizations. These invitations call us to partake in gatherings or events that celebrate some important event or achievement in somebody else’s life. Invitations are not like court summons because we can choose whether to respond or not, an option we do not have when it comes to legal notices which we have to respond to whether we like it or not. Usually the decision as to whether one responds favorably to an invitation depends on the occasion and relationship with the person who sends it. An invitation from close friends to their wedding is treated differently from an invitation from a company to attend a promotional event. Sometimes invitations from

loved ones are turned down because of other commitments.

So far we have been looking at ourselves as recipients of invitations and the power that we have in choosing either to attend or not. Now let us look at invitations from the perspective of the person who invites others. There is often great anticipation, preparation and hope because the person selects those whom he or she wants to attend, the people who are special to them and with whom they want to share the special occasion. Many invitations include a request for confirmation (RSVP) and there is joy with each arriving confirmation of attendance and disappointment when those invited are not able to come. However, the hardest and most painful case is when people do not even bother to respond, showing indifference and making planning and preparation all the more difficult. I have attended weddings where there were empty tables because people did not bother to respond and their places were kept in vain hope that they would show up. The result was a waste of food and disappointment by the hosts who were expecting their invited guests to attend the function.

I remember organizing a function for a group that I was chairing, and everyone took tickets and promised to sell them. A few days before the function I phoned the group members and they all said they would come and had sold tickets. On the day of the function only a few came and I had ordered food based on ex-

pectations and promises. Fortunately, the hotel was understanding and did not charge me for the food. I was heartbroken, but this experience developed within me a deep sensitivity to invitations and I am diligent in my responses whether or not I accept the invitation. God sends out invitations to humanity on a daily basis in many ways, calling us to respond to different calls, whether to repentance, or to act justly and lovingly to those whom we have offended, or to take time to worship and give thanks. The ultimate call of God is to a relationship of love and companionship, that transforms us to be channels through which God can reach out to our broken world, and to many people who are seeking to know God's love. God invites us during Mass to listen and respond in ways that transform our lives and make us into agents of transformation in our communities. How are we responding to God's invitation?

PROVERB

“There is always room for one more at the supper table.”

ACTION

Self-examination:

Reflect on the status of your relationship with God. If you are far from God, admit it and in your own words express your desire to respond to the invitation from God to a relationship of love and surrender.

Have you been rejecting a particular invitation that comes from God and calls for your decisive response?

Response to God:

God invites us into a deeper relationship with him by communicating in numerous ways, including our conscience, the Bible, the Mass, life circumstances, nature and other people. Reflect on the wonder of God desiring and inviting you into a relationship with him!

Response to your World:

God's invitation to a relationship with himself includes the desire to heal and restore human relationships. Think of the relationships in your life that need to be healed and/or restored. Does your group actively seek to reach out and invite others in order to grow in number and in diversity?

PRAYER

*LORD, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name
in all the earth!
You have set your glory
above the heavens.
When I look at your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars
that you have established;
what are human beings
that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?
Yet you have made them
a little lower than God,
and crowned them
with glory and honor.*

Ps 8:1.3-5