

TWENTY-EIGHTH  
SUNDAY IN  
ORDINARY TIME

YEAR A



FIRST READING

Isaiah 25:6–10

PSALM

Psalms 23:1–6

SECOND READING

Philippians 4:12–14, 19–20

GOSPEL

Matthew 22:1–14

**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**

*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 waited 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.

*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 circumstances 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.

*Matthew 22:1–14*

Once more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding 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 banquet.’ But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. Then he said to his slaves, ‘The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore 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 him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer

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darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' For many are called, but few are chosen."

## Hearing the Word

### "The Divine Invitation"

The liturgy of this Sunday calls for a reflection on the theme of God's invitation to his people, an invitation to draw close to their God. It also indicates the required response to this divine call.

The first reading paints a picture of a splendid future which God has prepared for all humanity, and which will unfold after Christ's second coming. In the vision of Isaiah, it appears in the forms of a splendid banquet with an abundance of food and drink, where humanity will no longer experience any insufficiency or lack of sustenance. Isaiah envisions this banquet 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 people find most difficult, unwanted and terrifying – death and suffering, as God will "swallow death up forever" and "wipe away the tears from all faces".

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 called 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 and military language, the prophet refers to what is commonly called "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 present 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 if they choose to adhere to their God, and walk in his ways. In the second reading, Paul closes his letter to the Philippians referring broadly to what he had experienced in the course of his ministry. Writing of having plenty or, alternatively, having little he must have thought of the joy and exaltation of apostolic success and support he received from the communities he founded. But he must also have remembered the insecurity and dangers of a missionary constantly on the move, unsure of what and who he will encounter in the next town. In fact, when writing this 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 circumstances. The secret to such adaptability lay in his life-focus. He famously stated that "I can do all things through him who strengthens me". His ability to adapt, and the power to endure, did not come from himself, but from God, who called him to serve as the apostle to the Gen-

tiles. 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.

The apostle still expressed his deep gratitude to the Philippians for helping him with the material provisions he needed 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 guaranteed that God would, in turn, provide them with all that they need in order to serve God as Paul did. Paul ended this section of the letter with "the doxology" – a prayer formula which acknowledges God's greatness manifested through his actions and blessings bestowed on his faithful.

Paul's writings, including the letter to the Philippians confirm that he was frequently in need, threatened, impoverished and in distress. Yet, he was always capable of looking at his present condition in the context of a greater purpose of what his life and mission were meant to serve. This allowed him to recognize that ultimately the Christian journey through life is a journey towards God's glory and salvation, and this realization enabled him to endure much, and not be dominated by a concern to meet his daily needs. Even threatened with death, Paul never lost that greater perspective on his life. From his prison he wrote to the Philippians an encouraging and joyful letter, beaming with hope and gratitude for an

opportunity that he and the Philippians were accorded by virtue God's invitation to serve him as the followers of Christ.

The Gospel contains yet another of Jesus's parable containing a stinging critique the chief priests and elders, for their rejection of him as God's Messiah. Today's parable employs the image 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 the king's servants. While rejection of a 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. In the past, many of God's servants – the OT prophets – 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 made them unworthy of it 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 originally 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 the statement "many are called, but few are chosen" means. Jesus, the king's son, came with an open invitation to everybody, regardless of who and where they are in life – many are called. Yet, only those who respond to this invitation adequately will be able to enter the kingdom of God which Jesus came to initiate.

The liturgy of this Sunday describes the universal invitation to experience God's salvation, which will come to its fullest expression in the form of a renewed world at the end of time, so powerfully described by Isaiah. Yet, the response to this invitation is required already in this present life, in the midst of a troubled world. Paul and Jesus emphasized that need to respond to God's invitation by rising above absorbing concerns of daily life and living with full awareness of God's greater purposes for the world and humanity. Such awareness allows the Christian to prepare adequately for their 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 who want to involve us in their activities or business. These invitations call us to partake in gatherings or events that celebrate some important events 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 regardless of 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. However, common to all invitations is the power that we have as invitees to either accept or decline the offer.

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 host are the people who



are special to them, and with whom they want to share a special occasion. Many invitations include a request for confirmation (RSVP) and there is joy with each arriving confirmation of attendance, or disappointment when those invited are not intending 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 free 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 expectations 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 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

I reflect on the status of my relationship with God. If I feel myself far from God, I admit it and in express the desire to respond to the invitation from God, to a relationship of love and surrender. Have I been persistently rejecting an invitation from God which calls for a decisive response? What is it?

### Response to God

God invites us into a deeper relationship with him by communicating in numerous ways, including our conscience, the Bible, the Eucharist, 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

I will identify an invitation to take up a new challenge in life which I have not been taking up, I will examine it, and decide whether to accept it or put it aside for good. What kinds of invitations has our group been putting out to reach out to others, in order to grow in number and in diversity? Are these satisfactory? What more can we do in this area?

### 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)

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