



TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Year A

Isaiah 25:6-10a
Psalm 23:1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6
Philippians 4:12-14, 19-20
Matthew 22:1-14

Gathering

(An unlit candle and several place settings of fine dinnerware are arranged on a cloth-covered table in the gathering place.)

We reflect on our standing invitation to the Lord's banquet and what it means to respond and prepare for the banquet. Last week we reflected on what it means to live faithfully in a way that bears fruit. How did your faith move you to act this past week?

Prayer

(The candle is lit. The leader invites the members to listen for the sound of the Spirit. After a time of quiet, a member of the community leads the prayer that follows. To each of the invocations members respond: "Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.")

Member: I will bless the Lord at all times;
his praise shall be ever in my mouth.
Let my soul glory in the Lord;
the lowly will hear me and be glad.

All: Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

Member: Glorify the Lord with me,
let us together extol his name.
I sought the Lord, and he answered me
and delivered me from all my fears.

All: Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

Member: Look to him that you may be radiant with joy,
and your faces may not blush with shame.
When the poor one called out, the Lord heard,
and from all his distress he saved him.

All: Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

Psalm 34:2-3, 4-5, 6-7

HEARING THE LORD'S GOSPEL

(The scriptures are proclaimed aloud with a pause after each reading. Following a pause after the proclamation of the gospel, the leader invites members to name a word or phrase from the gospel that stays with them, but without any additional comment. Some may repeat what another has already said.)

*When this naming is complete, the leader passes out copies of the scriptures of the week as needed. The leader then poses these questions: “**What draws you to this gospel?**” “**Where do you resist this gospel?**” The community pauses for a time of silent reflection. After about a minute, the leader invites members to consider the Reflection and Questions for the week. After a time for silent reflection, the leader invites members to re-arrange themselves in groups of three or four for sharing. The small groups move off so as not to intrude on one another.)*

Reflection

Take a minute and imagine savoring the “juicy, rich food and pure choice wines” described in Isaiah. Then imagine receiving an invitation to a wedding. Expectations rise. Where will it be, what will I wear, what will we eat and drink, and who else will be sitting at my table? This week’s

gospel extends an invitation from the best wedding planner of all.

His invitation is one of salvation. To *live in the house of the Lord all our days*, we put on that special garment that clothes us in Jesus Christ. How could anyone refuse? And yet, we see in this week's kingdom parable that the busyness of life results in people offering excuses. One needs to tend to his farm, and another his business. Where do your own priorities lie? How easily do you get caught up in your day to day worries and forget the greater calling of God?

In Jesus' time, there were different classes of people, just as there are today. Priests, tax collectors, Pharisees, known sinners of any kind and commoners would not be found sitting at the same banquet table. But, consider the image of inclusivity provided to us in this parable. The king gathers the "bad and good alike." Being at the same table with the marginalized, folks of lesser means than ourselves, the *different* people, however we construe the difference, this is not something that we find easy to do ourselves today. Why would we want to sit with those of no status, the vulnerable, the weak? If truth be told, more often than not we think of ourselves as privileged; we *belong* at the best tables.

God seeks to gather all his people. And so, while it was a struggle at first, when the early Christian community realized that the gentiles had been baptized in the Spirit, and baptized in water, they knew they belonged at the table. We prepare for the kingdom banquet, not only by putting on Christ ourselves, but also by finding room at the table for all who seek him.

Questions for Reflection and Conversation

- ◆ How do you feel when you receive an invitation to dinner?
- ◆ When has busyness been your excuse for not responding to some urging from Christ you felt in your life?
- ◆ How well prepared do you ordinarily feel when attending Mass?
- ◆ What expectations does God have for you when you participate in the eucharist?
- ◆ How comfortable are you with the "good and bad alike" being invited to the king's banquet?
- ◆ What is the impact on you of some of the people in your life resisting God/or church at least outwardly?

HEARING THE GOSPEL'S LORD

(After about fifteen minutes of sharing in threes/fours, the leader re-gathers the community. Once back together, members pause for a moment. The leader then poses these questions: "What do you hear Christ saying to us in hearing and sharing his word?" "What do you want to hold on to for yourself from this session?" "How are you/we being called to live in response to God's word?" After a pause, the leader invites the community to a time of conversation. When this sharing is complete, the community moves to a time of prayer.)

Response in Action Suggestions

- ◆ Before leaving the house to attend Mass this week, prepare by setting aside twenty minutes for reflection and prayer.
- ◆ Many in our world today carry a heavy cross. Find out how you may be able to help them make the cross lighter by learning more about getting involved in the work of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development at: www.usccb.org/about/catholic-campaign-for-human-development/.
- ◆ Step out of your comfort zone this week and get to know someone in your acquaintance whom you might not normally befriend.

Prayer

(After a brief pause, the gospel of the week is re-proclaimed by a member of the community. Following the proclamation, the leader poses these questions to the members: "What does Christ in his Spirit say to you now?" "What do you say to him in response?" The community pauses for a full five, perhaps even seven, minutes of prayerful attention to God. A brief instrumental selection may be played during part of this time. After this time of silence, the leader invites members simply to mention a word or two, or a brief expression that captures what they hear Christ saying to them personally. The community receives this without additional comment.

Following this sharing, the leader invites members to close their eyes and imagine themselves at a banquet with God. The leader then reads the meditation that follows, pausing between each phrase.)

Leader: You find yourself along with many others at a banquet

with God....Smell the rich food....Taste the choice wine....
Listen to the music....Smell the sweet flowers....Who is
sitting on either side of you?...What expression is on their
faces?...Where is God sitting?...He is speaking; what is he
saying?...What is your response?...

(Available on the Internet, the song, "Table of Plenty" is cued. The leader invites members to open their eyes as the song begins. Members join in singing. When the song is complete, the community prays as follows.)

All: You spread the table before me
 in the sight of my foes;
 you anoint my head with oil;
 my cup overflows.

Only goodness and kindness follow me
all the days of my life;
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
for years to come. Amen.

Psalm 23:5,6