

28th Sunday In Ordinary Time, Year A

Isaiah 25:6-10a

In the preceding chapter, we have what is called the “Apocalypse of Isaiah” for it speaks a declaration of God’s judgment on the whole world. Our selection is a poetic description of the paradise that awaits the survivors.³ The message in this reading came from a prophecy about 700 years before Christ came to earth but the things that Isaiah foretold, Jesus brought to pass.⁵

6On this mountain “This mountain” is Zion, the symbol of the heavenly Jerusalem. Here is the place where survivors will assemble and where God will manifest his Glory and renew his covenant with all. This harkens back to the covenant God made with all nations and all people after the flood in Noah’s time.¹ **the Lord of hosts** The end of chapter 24 presented Yahweh enthroned as king on Mount Zion. In oriental fashion the newly enthroned sovereign celebrates the occasion by a magnificent banquet at which choice foods are served. The guests are from all nations, as Yahweh is now really king of the entire universe.¹ **will provide for all peoples a feast of rich food and choice wines, juicy, rich food and pure, choice wines.** The use of banquet imagery is also used to describe the fullness of life in God’s presence.⁴ We believe that our participation in the Holy Eucharist is not merely a foreshadowing but a real participation in that marriage banquet in which our God takes all nations to Himself in the eternal covenant of love in Christ.³ Because of limitations in the Hebrew language, to show the wonders of this meal, it is described twice.

7On this mountain he will destroy the veil that veils all peoples, the web that is woven over all nations; The guests are apparently still mourning over their loved ones lost during the cosmic upheavals that were a universal punishment for mankind’s sin. But mourning and fear can have no place in God’s new kingdom. Therefore the Divine Host himself removes the mourning veils from the faces of his guests, wipes away their tears and destroys death, the cause of their sorrows, forever.¹ This can also be interpreted as the moment when the eyes of the nations will be opened and they will behold the glory of the Lord of hosts.⁶ Another possibility is that the veil may refer to the surface of the earth which covers the dead.¹⁸

she will destroy death forever. This is a promise of everlasting life.¹⁸ The sentence of death, which was part of the curse given to Adam, is cancelled out!¹⁴ **The Lord God will wipe away the tears from every face; the reproach of his people he will remove from the whole earth; for the Lord has spoken.** The Gentiles could only be in an outer court of the Temple. They couldn’t see the Holy of Holies from there but now they will be able to see it all and behold the glory of the Lord of Hosts!
9On 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!” This is what the world has been waiting for: SALVATION!⁶

10For the hand of the Lord will rest on this mountain. “The hand of the Lord” is power and strength.²

Philippians 4:12-14, 19-20

This is the concluding section of the letter that Paul wrote to the church of Philippi from a prison cell. Here he expresses his sincere gratitude for their kindness in sending gifts to provide for his basic needs even though he has learned to cope with both abundance and poverty. Even in the middle of this thank-you he points out that his real strength and sustenance comes from the Lord. Then he takes delight in assuring them that God will reward their generosity.⁴

Brothers and sisters:

12I know 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. Paul has learned to be content with what he has—through Christ—not just through his own efforts. The man who walks with Christ and lives in Christ can cope with anything.¹⁰

13I can do all things in him who strengthens me. This is a very significant line for here Paul recognizes that his strength comes from his connection to God. If he were separated from God, he would be like a broken branch. By acknowledging his own weakness, his faith draws power from the Power of Christ. Here we see Paul not as self-sufficient, but rather, as God-sufficient.¹⁰

14Still, it was kind of you to share in my distress. Under house arrest, Paul had to pay rent and buy food. But the believers in Rome were very likely reluctant to support a missionary accused of an imperial crime. It was dangerous to be associated with enemies of the state, so prudent people kept at arms' length. The Philippians sent gifts (which we call almsgiving) to Paul through Epaphroditus who was to stay and serve Paul but the man nearly died and Paul sent him back to Philippi. This was the only church from whom Paul accepted help for his general policy was not to accept material aid so as to leave no one in any doubt about the purity of his intentions in preaching the Gospel.⁽⁸⁾ He was also practicing the virtue of poverty, which was being content with what he had.⁽⁷⁾ Let us look for a minute at almsgiving. Since God rewards men for their actions, he who gives alms ultimately benefits more than he who receives. Notice that verses 15-18 have been edited from this passage. Here Paul says that he rejoices primarily because the gift they have given will put them in good stead with God. Their gesture of concern will bring them God's favor even more than it will benefit him.⁽⁴⁾ There is nothing essentially wrong with having money unless one is attached to it. Look at Lazarus. He went to hell, not for being rich and not for having parties, BUT FOR WHAT HE DID NOT DO! Prayer, fasting and almsgiving are the three forms of penance insisted upon by Scripture and the Fathers of the Church.⁹ (CCC 1434)

19My God will fully supply whatever you need, in accord with his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. The wealth of God is open to those who love God and who love their fellow men. The giver of a gift does not make himself poorer, he makes himself richer, for his own gift opens to him the gifts and the riches of God.⁸ The Philippians 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. Paul 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.¹⁸

20To our God and Father, glory forever and ever. Amen. This acclamation of praise signals the end of the letter even though a few verses of greetings follow.

Matthew 22:1-14

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.¹⁸ This parable of the Marriage Feast is an allegory of salvation history culminating in Jesus. The "king" is God who prepares a heavenly banquet for his son. The servants are the Old Testament prophets who are called to summon Israel. Because some of the "invited guests" who are the Israelites, ignored the prophets, God will destroy their city, which is Jerusalem. God will then send other servants as apostles to invite Gentiles, both bad and good, to the celebration. Those lacking proper attire are cast into the darkness of eternal punishment. The parable highlights God's impartial treatment of all who are called--Jews and Gentiles. He rewards and punishes on the basis of one's acceptance or rejection of his call.¹¹ In this parable we are asked to look at ourselves for WE MUST RESPOND!

1Jesus again in reply spoke to the chief priests and elders of the people in parables, saying,
2"The kingdom of heaven may be likened to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son. The wedding feast is an image of rejoicing and communion with God. The background is from our first reading from Isaiah where the salvation of God's people is portrayed as a joyful banquet. This takes place on two levels: the *present level* in which the Holy Eucharist is Christ's banquet of sacramental food and drink. Then there is the *future level* where the ultimate communion with Christ takes place in heaven with the unending union of God and his saints.¹¹

3He dispatched his servants to summon the invited guests to the feast, but they refused to come.

The guests had received invitations long before the wedding-day arrived. The coming of the Kingdom of God had been announced to Israel through all the periods of its history, and prophets and messengers of many kinds had in every age summoned Israel to the Kingdom that was to come.¹⁶

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

5Some 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.¹⁸

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

7The king was enraged and sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. The Fathers see in the first invitees the Jewish people. Indifference and hostility cause them to reject God's loving call and therefore to suffer condemnation.¹³ The burning of the city probably represents the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in AD 70.¹⁴

8Then he said to his servants, "The feast is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy to come. **9**Go out, therefore, into the main roads and invite to the feast whomever you find." In addition to the Gentiles, this may have included the marginal people within Israel: tax collectors and sinners, who accepted Jesus' message.¹⁵

10The servants went out into the streets and gathered all they found, bad and good alike, and the hall was filled with guests. The mixed condition of the Church containing both good and bad continues until the Judgment.¹⁴

11But when the king came in to meet the guests, he saw a man there not dressed in a wedding garment. A clean white garment was the proper dress for such festivities.¹⁴ The "wedding garment" would be a converted life full of good deeds. The sinners are invited but expected to repent.¹⁸ These deeds are outlined in Matthew as almsgiving, prayer, fasting, and works of mercy.¹¹ In the

letter to the Colossians, St. Paul describes the robe as a garment of heartfelt mercy, goodness, humility, modesty and patience, and all the folds of the robe being held together by that perfect belt which is charity.¹⁶

12The king said to him, ‘My friend, how is it that you came in here without a wedding garment?’ Simply accepting the kingdom is not enough—we must also live out our response to God’s invitation.¹² As the Catechism says, “Words are not enough; deeds are required.”⁹ (CCC 546) St. Gregory the Great explained that a person who goes into the feast without a wedding garment is someone who believes in the church but does not have charity. The wedding garment signifies the dispositions a person needs for entering the Kingdom of heaven. Even though he belongs to the Church, if he does not have these dispositions he will be condemned on the day when God judges all mankind. These dispositions essentially mean responding to grace.¹³ **But he was reduced to silence.**
13Then the king said to his attendants, These attendants are the angels who will execute the divine directives against the wicked at the Final Judgment.¹⁷ ‘Bind his hands and feet, and cast him into the darkness outside, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.’ The darkness, wailing and grinding of teeth are gruesome symbols of the state of lost souls.¹⁷ The point is that the Gentiles also need to respond faithfully to the call they have received; otherwise they will suffer the fate of being cast “into outer darkness”.¹³

14Many are invited, but few are chosen.” While God wills that all should be saved, in his infinite wisdom he respects man’s freedom to reject grace. The chosen are those who accept the call and do not reject the invitation like the first guests, or who do not accept it fully such as the man who came to dinner but is too much of a boor to dress in the proper manner.¹³ The view of the Pharisees was that all Jews, with very few exceptions, would share in the Messianic Kingdom. Here Jesus argues against this delusion.¹⁶

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) “The book Of Isaiah Chapters 1--59” by M. McNamara, M.S.C., (2) “Dictionary Of The Bible” by John L. McKenzie, S.J., (3) The Commentary And Notes of Sean Innerst and Tim Gray, (4) “Workbook For Lectors And Gospel Readers” by Aelred Rosser, (5) “The Bread Of Life Catholic Bible Study” by Deacon Ken e3 Marie Finn, (6) “Isaiah” By John F. A. Sawyer, (7) “The Navarre Bible: Captivity Epistles,” (8) “The Story of Stories” by Karen Lee-Thorp, (9) “Catechism Of The Catholic Church,” (10) “The Letters To The Philipppians, Colossians, And Thessalonians” by William Barclay, (11) “Ignatius Catholic Study bible: The Gospel of Matthew” With Introduction, Commentary, and Notes by Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, (12) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers” by Lawrence E. Mick, (13) “The Navarre Bible: St. Matthew,” (14) “The Jerome Biblical Commentary,” (15) “The Gospel of Matthew” by Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., (16) “The Sunday Epistles And Gospels” by Monsignor Patrick Boylan, (17) The Parables Of Christ” by Charles J. Callan, O.P., and (18) The St. Paul Center For Biblical Theology Online founded by Dr. Scott Hahn.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.