

PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES
TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
YEAR A

First Reading Isaiah 25: 6–10

The Book of Isaiah contains prophecies made in two entirely different periods, and is divided into three sections. Chapters 1–36, including today's text, belong to the end of the eighth century BC and were written under Syrian occupation before the Babylonian Exile.

Chapters 24–27 contain prophecies of cosmic disturbances and disasters, and are sometimes referred to as the 'Little Apocalypse'. They sum up the threats against Israel's opponents. However, today's verses are a hymn to the Lord and describe a banquet on a mountain (Mount Zion), a symbol of peace at the completion of time when death is no more.



There are many other instances of feasts and banquets in the Bible, including today's Gospel. Since they focus on fellowship, community and abundance, they have come to symbolise the eternal happiness which the coming of God's Kingdom

will bring. (Similar images can also be found in very early literature of the Canaan region.)

The promise of death's destruction cancels the sentence of death given in the Book of Genesis following the Fall (Genesis 3: 19) and brings to our modern minds images of the Resurrection.

Also worthy of note is the fact that the Lord's promise concerns 'all peoples' and not just Israel.

It is possible to see the conflicts, famines, and natural disasters which affect our own world as a '*shroud*' enveloping us all. We can then be reassured by the Lord's promise that he will remove it.

Gospel Matthew 22: 1–10
The parable of the wedding banquet

Jesus uses this parable about the Kingdom of Heaven in reply to those questioning his authority. Once again his audience is made up of chief priests and elders, the very people who would shortly be arresting him. This particular parable has very many parallels with Luke's story of the Great Dinner (Luke 14: 16–24) but it shows evidence of comprehensive rewriting.

A King gives a great wedding banquet for his son

Matthew's listeners were familiar with the image of a banquet representing God's relationship with Israel (see First Reading). Jesus uses this image frequently in his parables— his welcome to sinners and feasting with them is an acted sign of the call to all people to join in this heavenly banquet.

The guests would not come to the banquet

It was a Middle Eastern custom to send two invitations to give people plenty of warning, especially for those coming from a great distance. Wedding feasts would last for weeks and were a good way of showing one's power and wealth. In fact, preparations took a long time as roads sometimes needed to be built for important guests (cf. John the Baptist: 'Prepare a way for the Lord'). In a society where honour and shame were all important, to refuse the King's invitation was a real act of rebellion.

The violence towards the servants in his parable would be tantamount to high treason, especially at a time when there was no social mobility, and when 5% of the population owned 95% of the country's wealth.

The King was furious

The burning of the city is probably a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem which occurred some 10–15 years before Matthew wrote his Gospel.

Invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet ... good and bad alike

It is possible to see in this parable a symbol of God (the King) inviting his people (the guests). The original guests (Israel) do not accept his call and newcomers (Gentiles), respond to his invitation. As with any group of people, they are not all virtuous in equal measure. Matthew is preparing his audience for the shape of the new first-century Church.