

# Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A

October 9, 2011

## First Reading

*Isaiah 25:6-10a*

The Lord will provide richly for his people.

## Responsorial Psalm

*Psalm 23:1-6*

The Lord is our shepherd.

## Second Reading

*Philippians 4:12-14, 19-20*

Paul tells the Philippians that God provides whatever he needs.

## Gospel Reading

*Matthew 22:1-14* (shorter form Matthew 22:1-10)

Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a wedding feast.

## Background on the Gospel Reading

Immediately after criticizing the religious leaders through the parable of the tenants in last Sunday's Gospel, Jesus proceeded to tell another parable, again directed at the religious leaders. We hear this parable in today's Gospel.

In the parable of the wedding feast, Jesus offers an image of the kingdom of heaven using the symbol of a wedding banquet. In today's first reading from the prophet Isaiah and in today's psalm, the Lord's goodness is evident in the symbol of a feast of good food and wine. Jesus' listeners would have been familiar with the image of a wedding feast as a symbol for God's salvation. They would consider themselves to be the invited guests. Keeping this in mind helps us to understand the critique Jesus makes with this parable. The context for this parable is the growing tension between Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem. This has been the case for the past two Sundays and will continue to be true for the next several weeks.

The parable Jesus tells is straightforward. The king dispatches his servants to invite the guests to the wedding feast that he is planning for his son. The listeners would have been surprised to learn that the first guests refused the invitation. Who would refuse the king's invitation? A second dispatch of servants follows. Again to the listeners' great surprise, some guests ignore the invitation. Some of the invited guests even go so far as to mistreat and kill the servants. The king invokes his retribution against these murderers by destroying them and burning their city.



We might stop here for a moment. Why would some guests kill the servants sent to invite them to the king's wedding feast? It might be possible that the king was a tyrant, evidenced by the destruction of the city of those who refused his invitation. But if we follow this idea, then the allegory seems to be about something other than the kingdom of heaven. It is more likely that the destruction of the city would have been a powerful image corresponding to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D. 70, which would have been an important event for Matthew's audience.

With the invited guests now deemed unworthy to attend the king's wedding feast, the servants are sent to invite whomever they can find. The guests arrive, but it appears that accepting the king's invitation brings certain obligations. The guest who failed to dress in the appropriate wedding attire is cast out of the feast. We are reminded that while many are invited to the kingdom of heaven, not all are able to meet its requirements. God invites us to his feast, giving us his salvation. Yet he asks us to repent for our sins.

Jesus' message in the parable cautions against exclusive beliefs about the kingdom of heaven. The parable also teaches about humility. Those who assume that they are the invited guests may find that they have refused the invitation, and so others are invited in their place. To accept the invitation is also to accept its obligations. God wants our full conversion in complete acceptance of his mercy.

### **Family Connection**

Today's Gospel reminds us that God invites all of us to his kingdom. How do we respond to this invitation? In theological terms, God has granted us free will to accept or reject salvation. The parable of the wedding feast reminds us that God desires our wholehearted acceptance of his invitation to salvation.

As you gather as a family, discuss what you consider appropriate attire for various occasions. For example, if your family were invited to a neighbor's barbecue, what would you wear? If you were planning to attend the symphony, what might you wear? If invited to an evening wedding, what might you wear? Discuss how our preparations for an event and our choice of attire indicates the importance and value we place on the occasion. In today's Gospel Jesus uses this metaphor to talk about the kingdom of heaven. Read Matthew 22:1-14. Discuss why the guest was thrown out of the wedding feast. What does Jesus expect of those who accept his invitation of salvation? What would be the evidence of our conversion to God's salvation? Pray together as a family that you will respond wholeheartedly to God's invitation to salvation. Pray together today's psalm, Psalm 23.