28TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Isaiah 25:6-10a

Philippians 4:12-14,19-20

Matthew 22:1-14

Food is used in all three readings today as an image of God’s favor and presence with His people. In both the first reading and the Gospel, the joys of salvation are compared to a great banquet of rich foods, choice wines and a place at the table with our Divine Host. In the first reading Isaiah describes the Messianic banquet on the Lord’s Mountain. The prophet sees the mountain of the Holy City transformed into a grand banquet hall full of life and good things. He paints the picture of “a feast of rich food and choice wines.” The Responsorial Psalm (Ps 23) describes how, like a totally committed shepherd, God spares nothing in order to provide nourishment for His flock. In the second reading, Paul says that he lives as a guest invited to the Kingdom of God, enjoying vast spiritual benefits as a man of Faith. So will God provide for us, he assures us, and we, too, “can do all things in God Who strengthens us.” In the Gospel’s parable, Jesus describes the eschatological banquet of Heaven. He characterizes the reign of God as a wedding feast, a banquet of “calves and fatted cattle.” When the banquet is rejected by the chosen guests, it is offered to all and sundry. Thus, all the readings suggest that God loves His people and provides for their eternal salvation. Today’s Scripture readings give us the strong warning that if we do not accept God’s love, if we reject His gift, we can have no place with Him. We have to stay prepared for the freely offered Heavenly Banquet by getting (in Baptism), and wearing every day, the freely given wedding garment of grace always. We “wear” the garment by cooperating with God’s grace in prayer, in attending Mass and receiving the Sacraments with devotion, in doing good and avoiding evil, and in responding to His love by lovingly sharing our blessings with others. The parable warns us that membership in a Church alone does not guarantee our eternal salvation.

We need to be grateful to Christ for the invitation to the Heavenly banquet: From the moment of our Baptism, we have been invited to the Heavenly Banquet and provided with the Wedding Garment of Sanctifying Grace. These great privileges and blessings are freely offered to all, and they are given to us who accept His Gift of Faith, by a loving God. These daily Divine invitations to salvation are to be welcomed with a willingness to be daily transformed by God’s grace and according to God’s will. But, the same obstacles which prevented the Pharisees from entering the Kingdom –- pride, love of this world, its wealth, its power, and its pleasures –- can impede us, too. Hence, we must be prepared to do violence to our ordinary inclinations and to offer ourselves in love and service to Jesus and to his people. That is how we will make, and keep, our Wedding Garment clean and bright every day. Receiving these gifts of God fully also demands that, instead of remaining marginal members of our parish community, we bear visible witness to our beliefs. Let us have the consoling conviction that, while as Church members we are expected to contribute actively to its life and witnessing, the forgiveness of God and of the community is always available whenever we fail, and betray its ideals in our weak moments. Therefore, let us pray that we may keep our Wedding Garments pure and spotless, and that we may become disciples who really practice the teachings of Jesus, rather than remaining mere Sunday Catholics. Let us pray for a deeper Faith, Hope, and Love, and a better spirit of responsibility to our community.

We need to make our “banquet halls” full and vibrant. What do we do to make sure that the “banquet halls” of our Churches are filled with people on Sunday mornings? Are we concerned enough to do something about it if they are not full or lively? The first part of the parable has some strong connections with our worship services. Does not God invite us there? Aren’t we also called to be the Lord’s messengers who are instructed to go and tell the invitees (the whole world) that everything is ready? Or do we absent ourselves because we have other “pressing” business that we think is more important? Do we remain mired in oppressive attitudes and discriminatory relationships even if our bodies are in Church? Do we ever prefer revenge to forgiveness? Do we see victimization of others and blame the victim? We must all work with God to rid ourselves of such attitudes.

We need to wear our Wedding Garment for the Eucharistic banquet: The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC #1402-1405,CCC #2837) teaches that the Eucharist is the foretaste of the Messianic Banquet. God Incarnate waits for us in His House of Worship, offering Himself for us on our altars and inviting us to the sumptuous Banquet of His own Body and Blood for the nourishment of our souls in the Holy Eucharist. Hence, we should never approach to receive Jesus in Holy Communion “improperly dressed”—that is, without being in the state of Sanctifying Grace given us in Baptism. St. Paul says we eat and drink condemnation on ourselves when we approach the Sacrament in mortal sin (1 Cor 11:27-32). Just as the king provides clothes for the guests, so Jesus provides the Sacrament of Penance to cleanse our soul, but if we don’t go to confession and instead come to Communion unworthily, we’re just like the person in the parable who nonchalantly tries to show up for the banquet in his own dirty clothes rather than in the vesture given. According to St. Gregory, men and women who come to the Wedding Feast with hatred in their hearts do not wear the acceptable garment spoken of in the parable. Men and women whose Faith and love are cold, who attend Church only for social reasons, to show off their clothes and jewelry, or to visit with acquaintances, are not dressed in a Wedding Garment pleasing to the King, Christ Jesus. Our Wedding Garment is made of our grace-assisted works of justice, charity, and holiness. Let us examine ourselves to see whether we have fully accepted God’s invitation to the Messianic banquet, and let us remember that banqueting implies friendship and intimacy, trust, and reconciliation with Christ who loves us every day of our lives.