

## Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A

Isaiah 25:6-10a; Philippians 4:12-14. 19-20; and Matthew 22:1-14

Not receiving many invitations these days, huh? Only immediate family members can attend weddings, baptisms and graduations. Many people are cutting back on visits. Staff meetings, classes and business meetings, conferences, sporting events and carnivals, all curtailed. Besides pandemic concerns, fires, hurricanes and protests keep us apart. With all the turmoil, we aren't in the mood to party anyway.

The Scriptures this Sunday call our attention to the invitations God is sending us, each and every day. In Isaiah 25, God is the ultimate host! At God's party, the food and wine will be of the highest quality and in great abundance. It will be held "on this mountain," a phrase repeated three times to emphasize that we will be in the place where humans touch the divine. It is not a specific mountain, because God's invitation extends to "all peoples." Some scholars think that this feast signifies an eternal relationship of happiness with the divine, while others see it as referring only to God's promises in the here and now. Either way, the graciousness of God the Great Host is undeniable.

In the time of Moses, God and the Israelite leaders shared a meal to seal the covenant. As was common, the more powerful party, God, pledged to protect the Israelites, the less powerful party. So too in this vision, where God promises protection in five ways. God will eliminate the veil that veils all peoples, indicating we will no longer see our cultural differences as threatening. God will also destroy the web woven over two nations, meaning an end to all adversarial entanglements. Thirdly, God will swallow up our ultimate threat, death. Fourth, God will tenderly wipe the tears on every face. We marvel because, in our experience, lack of resources or compassion means only some people's suffering gets addressed. Lastly, God will remove the reproach people feel for their collective sins. Imagine how different our country would be without shame covertly driving so much.

Of course, we want to RSVP with joy as Isaiah predicts. How do we get then to the gospel, with its two parables about people dissing this beautiful invitation? The host sent not one but two invitations to his lavish feast. However, the responses are refusal, ignoring, choosing to do something else, abuse and murder. Lest we deny any similar behaviors where God is concerned, consider a few modern examples. Some folks hear "Black Lives Matter" as a threat to white people, rather than an invitation to broaden our circle of concern. Many are too busy to take time for a day, or even a half day, of Sabbath or for prayer or quiet time in which God can speak. Our nation closed its southern border to most asylum seekers, sending them back to life-threatening situations, rather than welcoming them as we would Christ. In the parable, all of the people invited the second time reply not in words, but in actions; so do we.

The second parable builds on the first but has a different focus. It "holds two truths in balance: the kingdom proclaimed and enacted by Jesus is a great act of acceptance enclosing good and bad alike; [and] once 'within' in this sense, however, conversion of life ('righteousness') is required."<sup>1</sup> God expects appropriate behavior of us, viz. acting as if we know where we are. Today, that clearly means living in hope. Hopeful people do not complain that Zoom is not as good as the real thing, but rejoice that Zoom is available at all. They live like current troubles are not forever troubles because they know resurrection beats death every time. They look around for the struggling and help them, because they know the power of love. The alternative is a hell of our own making, outside of the party.

I cannot close without a nod to Paul's declaration, "I can do all things in him who strengthens me." From the moment Paul met Jesus on the road to Damascus, through every Christian community he has supported and now in his imprisonment, his relationship with Jesus has been his reality. He knows he is already on the mountain with God; the Kingdom of God has already begun, even while it has yet to be accomplished. Paul lived like this is true. Do we?

- ❖ What have you been struggling with that you have not brought to prayer? Hear God's promise to protect you and dump it roundly in God's lap.
- ❖ Which of God's five promises appeals most to you? How can you embody it for someone else?

© 10/06/2020, Bernadette Rudolph

---

<sup>1</sup> Brendan Byrne, SJ, "Matthew," *The Paulist Biblical Commentary*, Paulist Press, 2018, p. 953.