

TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

October 11, 2020 A

Facilitator: *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.*

Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *Good and gracious God, you lavish us with your Word and bless us with your presence. Be with us now as we gather to share life and break open your Word. This we pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Response to last week's Word: [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

Facilitator reads focus statement: The first reading and the Gospel uses banquet imagery to speak of God's heavenly blessings. In the second reading, Paul shares with us how he has learned to live with abundance and with poverty.

Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is he wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.

Read the first reading, the psalm, and the second reading, pausing briefly after each one.

FIRST READING: Isaiah 5:1-7

Images of a banquet are used to sum up the blessings that God's people will experience on the last day. Notice that this heavenly banquet is prepared not only for the people of Israel, but for *all* people who hear and answer God's call. At this feast, the "veil" or all that separates us from God will be lifted and the spider's "web" that imprisons us in ignorance and isolation will be brushed aside. Tears, guilt and shame will be replaced with joy.

The reading is intended to give hope to a people who may have felt abandoned by God because of some bad things that recently happened to them. Isaiah also speaks of a time of restoration. The day will come when God will return and renew the broken covenant. This will take place symbolically on a mountain, just as the original covenant was made with Moses on a mountain.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 23

God's shepherding care for his people is celebrated in both pastoral and banquet imagery.

SECOND READING: Philippians 4:12-14, 19-20

This concludes our month-long series of readings from Philippians. While Paul is incarcerated, some of the Philippians send him gifts to help him endure the hardships of prison life. While grateful for the gifts, Paul shares that through his missionary journeys, he has learned to be content with both famine and feast.

Eating well or going hungry cannot compare with the strength Paul experiences in surrendering his life to Christ. He learns what Mary, the sister of Martha, had also come to know: "Only one thing is necessary," namely, belonging to and being possessed by Christ. With Christ, Paul can say: "My food is to do the will of him who sent me" (Jn 4:34). Paul concludes by exhorting his readers to place their trust in the "magnificent riches of God."

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Matt. 22:1-14

As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.

**A participant reads the Gospel,
then all pause to reflect.**

As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.

GOSPEL: Matthew 22:1-14

Like our first reading, the kingdom of God is imaged as a banquet to which all are invited to attend. The main focus of the parable is the *response* or *lack of response* from the invited guests. In this parable, Jesus continues to call the Pharisees and the religious leaders to conversion. Two invitations have been extended but the invitees refuse to come. Some even abuse and kill the servants delivering the invitations

(a reference to the Old Testament prophets and the early Christian missionaries).

There is one troubling verse in the Gospel which reads: *“The King was enraged and sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city.”* What are we to make of this verse, assuming that the King in the story represents God? Scholars tell us that the destruction of the city by the King is a reference to the Roman emperor’s destruction of Jerusalem about 70 AD, before Matthew wrote his Gospel. It would seem that Matthew interpreted this violent event as God’s punishment of the Jews for their rejection of Jesus. But such an interpretation does not square with Jesus’ love for *all* people—Jew and Gentile alike. As stated above, the main point of the parable is *not* about what God is like, but about the *negative response* of the religious leaders and all those invited to Jesus’ call to enter the Kingdom that he is inaugurating.

The final piece about the *‘wedding garment’* underlines the importance of not only saying ‘yes’ to Christ, but also *living* according to his values. It is one thing to present oneself for Baptism; it is another thing to *live daily* the Christian way of life. We must “clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience” (Colossians 3:12). While all are invited to the banquet of God’s Kingdom, not all will respond.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Turn to the person next to you and share what verse or image in the readings caught your attention or drew you in. Was there a verse or aspect of the readings that challenged you?

The facilitator can decide which is more helpful: to share the next questions with the whole group, or to share in smaller groups of three or four.

2. Paul speaks about living with abundance and with very little. What has been your experience in life? Have you had an experience of both abundance and very little?

3. What does living out your baptism mean to you?

4. The image of a banquet is one of the most common images used in the Bible to describe the Kingdom of God or heaven. Why do you think this is so? What makes a banquet a suitable image of heaven?

5. Do you believe everyone is invited to have a place in God’s Kingdom? What do you think constitutes a refusal or ‘no’ to Jesus’ invitation?

6. Name one thing today’s Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

RESPONDING TO GOD’S WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week’s readings. Suggestion: As you move through the week, try to be aware to what extent your words and actions are a Christian response to those you interact with.

JOURNALING

Having listened to God’s Word and listened to others reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as he asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.

PRAYING WITH THE WORD

Facilitator: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: *Jesus, you call us to sit at your table. Help me to act in all things as one of your children.*

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: What are we grateful for? For what or for whom do we need to pray?

CLOSING PRAYER (together)

*Lord Jesus,
you invite us to the banquet of your love.
Help us to respond to your invitation
with our hearts adorned with love
of God and neighbor.*