

## Bible Study

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

**Opening Prayer:** (Sign of the Cross) “Lord our God, you fashioned each person in your own image and likeness, and you destined us to share the fullness of your love when our time on this earth is completed. We ask that you use these holy words and our reflections to draw us ever closer to you, through Christ our Lord. Amen.”

#### **Re-connecting Question**

1. What makes a meal into a “banquet” in your opinion?
2. How do you imagine heaven to be?

#### **Commentary before the First Reading: Isaiah 25:6-10a**

The lengthy years of reconstruction of Jerusalem and of the Temple were discouraging to many Jews after their long exile in Babylon. The writer of this section of the Book of Isaiah used the image of a banquet to remind the people of what God had already done for them and of God’s promise of continued compassion. He would even bring a day when they would no longer be criticized (“reproached”) for being different from other cultures. The mountain referred to here is the high hill upon which Jerusalem was built.

Read the First Reading aloud.

1. According to the prophecy, for whom is God’s call to salvation intended?
2. What do you think the “veil that veils all peoples” refers to? (the answer is in verse 8)
3. The use of a banquet as a symbol for eternal bliss is deep within our Judeo-Christian roots. What do you see in this reading that also makes it appropriate for a funeral? It is one of the suggested options for a funeral.
4. Point out phrases in the reading that might also be used in reference to the Holy Eucharist.
5. In what ways do Christians already experience, to some degree, the image described in this reading?

#### **Commentary before the Second Reading: Philippians 4:12--20**

St. Paul wrote the Letter to the Philippians from a jail cell. He was especially fond of the Christians in Philippi, mentioning in other letters how generously they supported his missionary work in Corinth, Thessalonica and Berea. They even provided him a means of purchasing small necessities by sending him money while he was in prison, since prisoners were normally treated very harshly unless they bribed their guards.

Read the Second Reading aloud.

1. What is the tone of this passage – bragging, begging, gratitude, or teaching? Why do you say that?
2. Point out phrases that indicate Paul is at peace with his situation, even though he is incarcerated.
3. In what way will the Philippians profit from their generosity to Paul?
4. In keeping with the theme of the First Reading and the Gospel, identify phrases that might also describe the celestial banquet called heaven.

#### **Commentary before the Gospel Reading: Matthew 22:1-14**

As in the First Reading, this reading also compares the Kingdom of Heaven to a banquet. However, the point of this parable is quite different from the point of the prophecy. The passage immediately before this one was last Sunday’s Gospel in which Jesus foretold that, because of the infidelity of their religious leaders, God would take away the exclusive favor historically enjoyed by the Jewish people. That theme is developed further here too.

Read the Gospel Reading aloud.

1. Speak aloud a word or phrase that caught your attention in this reading?
2. Who were the servants initially sent by God to invite the Jewish people to change their behavior in order to enter the kingdom of God?
3. Which person might be symbolized by the next set of servants sent to call the Jews into God’s providence?
4. One source says that in ancient times the wealthy who hosted a wedding feast offered a fresh garment to the guests so that they could change out of their dusty, sweaty traveling clothing before they relaxed at the banquet. With that in mind, what might the behavior of the improperly clothed guest symbolize?
5. From the vantage point of being written in 80 or 90 AD, which part of the parable might have been referring also to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD?

### **Applying the Readings to our Daily Lives**

1. Why doesn't God just ignore those who refuse to be his disciples and lavish his attention instead on those who are striving to be good disciples?
2. Describe some of the ways that you already experience the abundance of God's goodness, already sharing in the Lord's generosity.
3. In reference to part of the Second Reading, how does charitable giving to various causes enhance our ability to live as God desires?
4. Do you think of your sacrificial giving and charity in the way St. Paul was describing to the Philippians?
5. Can you share one way in which a conversion of heart led you to change how you were living?
6. Is there any change of heart or change in behavior that you feel God inviting you to consider?

### **Closing Prayer**

Holy and merciful Father, you are full of compassion. Bring us back to your table when we refuse your invitation in order to pursue other interests. Change our minds to think more like you do; change our hearts to see others more like you do; change our lives into mirrors of your love, revealed to us in Jesus our Savior, who with you and the Holy Spirit is God forever and ever. Amen." (Sign of the Cross)