

October 15 XXVIII Sunday in Ordinary Time

Today's Scripture readings offer us a standing invitation to the everlasting joy of the Heavenly Banquet and a loving warning to stay ready always for this Heavenly banquet by constantly wearing the wedding garment, i.e., remaining in a state of grace by avoiding sins and by doing good.

In the first reading, Isaiah describes the Messianic banquet on the Lord's mountain in the Holy City of Jerusalem, which Yahweh is preparing for His people. The "Good News" is that it is a great feast of "rich food and choice wines." But, for the children of Israel, the "bad news" is that Yahweh invites all people, including Gentiles, to the banquet. In the second reading, St. Paul advises the Philippians to put their trust in the power and goodness of a providing God, Who, in Jesus, has given His Church everything His followers will need to participate in the Heavenly Banquet. In today's Gospel, by telling an allegoric parable of judgment in the Temple of Jerusalem two days before his arrest, Jesus accuses the Jewish religious and civil leaders of rejecting God's invitation to the Heavenly Banquet given to them through God's Own Son, Himself. They have rejected the invitation by not listening to the Good News preached by Jesus and by not reforming their lives. This invitation was repeatedly extended to Israel through the prophets, including John the Baptist. But the leadership contemporary with Jesus rejected the reality that Jesus was the fulfillment of all prophecy, refused to accept God's invitation to righteous living given through John the Baptist and through Jesus, and now planned to kill God's own Son, Jesus. Hence, God is inviting the sinners and Gentiles to His banquet, and that is why Jesus is keeping the company of sinners.

1) We need to be grateful to Jesus 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. 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.

2) We need to wear our Wedding Garment for the Eucharistic banquet: The Catechism of the Catholic Church 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.