

28th Sunday per Annum - A
Isaiah 25:6-10a;
Philippians 4:12-14, 19-20;
Matthew 22:1-14
Little Flower - 10/12/14

My Brothers and Sisters,

As the Church year begins to draw to a close, the readings become more focused on the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God.

Already in the Old Testament, Isaiah prophesied that the kingdom of God would be like a banquet. God would provide *“for all peoples a feast of rich food and choice wines, juicy, rich food and pure, choice wines.”* However, more importantly, in his kingdom, God would destroy death forever and wipe away the tears from every face.

In the New Testament, Jesus’ favorite image for the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven was a banquet. However, to understand the image, we have to understand that for the Jews of Jesus’ time, meals were sacred times of intimacy with God and others. This is why Jewish worship took place primarily in the context of meals: the weekly Sabbath supper and the annual Passover Seder Supper. This is also why our most important act of worship is the Eucharist, itself a meal.

If we want to know what heaven will be, today’s readings tell us. Heaven will be complete intimacy with God and with others. Likewise, if we want to know what hell will be, today’s readings also tell us. Hell will be complete isolation from God and from others.

The parable of the wedding feast or the wedding garment reminds us that we are free to accept or to reject God’s invitation to his banquet. Some of those invited were not ready to say yes. Some others had more important things to do. Still others were simply bad people. The king, or God, then threw open his feast to all others, bad and good alike. Pope Francis consistently stresses God’s love, mercy, and forgiveness.

The one puzzling thing in today’s Gospel was the king’s anger at the man without a wedding garment. How could any of them have been expected to wear a wedding garment if they were just rounded up off the streets? Scripture scholars tell us that in Jesus’ time the host provided the wedding garments. In other words, the king was angry because the man refused to wear the wedding garment that was provided. The parable suggests that God does hold us accountable for our choices.

My brothers and sisters, one of the cabinet members in John Kennedy’s administration liked to tell the story of the magazine reporter who was assigned to write a story about heaven and hell. First, she journeyed to hell where she found a huge banquet hall with tables piled high with the very best foods. All the people, however, were emaciated as though they were starving. When the reporter looked closely, she saw that the people had no elbows. Therefore, although they were surrounded with food, they were starving because they could not feed themselves.

She then journeyed to heaven. She found an identical banquet hall with tables piled high with the same delicious foods. However, all the people looked well fed. She assumed that the difference was that the people had working elbows to feed themselves. However, when she looked closely, she saw they, too, had no elbows. What was the difference? The people in heaven fed each other. The difference between heaven and hell, then, is the difference between love and care for others and radical selfishness.