

28th Sunday per Annum - A
Isaiah 25:6-10a;
Philippians 4:12-14, 19-20;
Matthew 22:1-14
Little Flower - 10/11/20

My Brothers and Sisters,

Throughout the Old and New Testaments, the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God is described as a banquet. This image provides us with a real insight into what heaven will be like. For the Jews of Jesus' time, meals were sacred times of intimacy with God and with others. Therefore, the most important Jewish liturgical celebrations did not take place in the temple or the synagogue but in the family, i.e., Passover and the weekly Sabbath Supper. The happiness and joy of heaven will be intimacy with God and others.

In today's Gospel, Jesus teaches that the happiness and joy of heaven are for all people. God desires the salvation of all. At the same time, since he does not force salvation on us, it is our choice whether we accept or reject his invitation to the wedding feast of his Son.

However, the image of the banquet in Isaiah is even more powerful: "*On this mountain the LORD of hosts will provide for all peoples a feast of rich food and choice wines, juicy, rich food and pure, choice wines.*" The image in Isaiah suggests not just an abundance of food and wine but a superabundance of food and wine. The key word is *superabundance*.

Our introductory course on Christian Revelation in Rome was taught by Fr. René Latourelle. He spent much time studying and reflecting on the uniqueness of Christian revelation. One of the unique characteristics of Christian revelation was the superabundance of God's love as revealed in John 3:16: "*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son...*" According to Fr. Latourelle, God not only loved us, but he loved us so much that he gave his only Son.

According to Isaiah, on his holy mountain, the Lord will destroy death forever. If the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God is intimacy with God and others, it is also fullness of life. As Jesus said in John 10, "*I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly*" [10b]. With the gifts of superabundant love, complete intimacy with God and others, and life to the full, God will wipe away the tears from every face.

At the same time, we are not yet living in the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God. Therefore, it is important that we learn to live well in this life. Paul wrote to the Philippians that he knew how to live well with a lot or a little. In other words, what we have or do not have should not be the measure of our happiness or unhappiness in life. We all know people who have so much but are so unhappy, and we also know people who have so little yet seem very happy. Since intimacy and love are life giving, if we have intimacy and love in our life, we will be fully alive. Finally, Paul reminds us that God is the giver of all gifts, and Jesus is the greatest gift of all.

My brothers and sisters, one of President Kennedy's cabinet members often told a story about heaven and hell. A magazine editor decided to send a reporter to heaven and hell to write a feature story on them. She went to hell first where she found a banquet hall filled with tables laid out with the finest foods, but everyone looked emaciated. The reason was because those in hell had no elbows, so they could not eat. She then went to heaven. She found the same banquet hall with the same foods on the tables. Everyone looked well fed, so she assumed that their arms had elbows. However, she quickly discovered she was wrong. What was different was that they fed each other. However, if God loved us superabundantly, we are called to love others superabundantly. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "*...whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully*" [2 Cor. 9:6].