

My Brothers and Sisters,

Once again this week the Old Testament reading provides the interpretative key to the parable in the Gospel: *"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."* In other words, the kingdom of heaven is a like a banquet.

However, to understand the image of the banquet, we have to understand it as the Jews of Jesus' time would have understood it. For the Jews of Jesus' time, meals were not just dinners. For the Jews of Jesus' time, meals were sacred times of intimacy with God and with others. For example, the main religious celebrations of the Jewish people did not take place in the temple or synagogue but in the home. The annual Passover Supper was their most important annual religious celebration. Their most important weekly religious celebration was the Sabbath supper.

Therefore, the joy of heaven will be complete intimacy with God and others. Hell, then, will be complete isolation from God and from others. Since God created us to be in a relationship of knowledge and love with Him and others, complete isolation from God and others would be the ultimate punishment.

The reading from Isaiah also suggests two other qualities of the kingdom of heaven or the kingdom of God. Death is referred to as the *"the web that is woven over all nations."* On God's holy mountain, in his kingdom, death will be destroyed forever. The other quality is that *"The Lord God will wipe away the tears from every face."* In the kingdom of heaven, there will be no sin, suffering, sickness, or death, of which there is so much in our world today. The war between Israel and Hamas makes that perfectly clear.

In the parable, the invited guests twice refused to come. However, because the banquet was prepared, the king sent his servants out to the roads to invite whomever they found, good and bad alike. It seems to me that this is what Pope Francis has been challenging us to do from the moment he was elected. He has challenged us to go the peripheries, to the marginalized, and to proclaim the Gospel to them and invite and welcome them into our Christian family.

We believe that every Eucharist anticipates the heavenly banquet. The current Eucharistic Revival is focused on deepening our faith in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. It was triggered by a survey that showed that many Catholics do not believe in the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. However, a more recent survey by CARA suggests that disbelief in the Real Presence is not as pronounced as it appeared in the first survey. The language of the two surveys made a significant difference.

Nevertheless, there is still need for a Eucharistic revival because so many people are not answering the invitation to be part of Sunday Eucharist. If we focus on Holy Communion, we realize that receiving the Body and Blood of Christ, we deepen our union with God and our unity with one another. The Eucharist, especially in the form of wine, symbolizes celebration, our anticipation of the heavenly banquet.

My brothers and sisters, if Jesus is God's greatest gift to us, the Eucharist is Jesus' greatest gift to us. As the Second Vatican Council taught, "Really partaking of the body of the Lord in the breaking of the Eucharistic bread, we are taken up into communion with Him and with one another." As St. Paul wrote, *"Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf"* [1 Cor. 10:17]. Finally, because of our hope in the heavenly banquet and our communion with God and others here on earth, like St. Paul we can live joyfully with abundance or in humble circumstances.