

28<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY A 2008      OCTOBER 12, 2008

FR. JOE SOBIERAJSKI, S.J.

ISAIAH 25:6-10A    PHILIPPIANS 4:12-14, 19-20

MATTHEW 22:1-14



There are certain occasions in the course of our lives that demand celebration. Every year we celebrate our birthdays, but when we reach certain plateaus 21, 40, 50, 60, 75 we usually make them occasions for special celebration. We celebrate Baptism, First Communion, even funerals not simply with religious ceremonies, but also with feasting: lunches or dinners of some sort. There is, however, one event which seems to universally call forth more celebration than others. It doesn't matter if a couple is Hindu, or Moslem, or Jewish, or Christian or even atheists, marriages usually call for feasting and celebration which sometimes going on for days. The commitment of one man to one woman, with the intention that the commitment is life-long has resonated with us as human beings through time and space. From the poorest peasant to the wealthiest entrepreneur there seems a need for lavish celebration because, perhaps, marriage is both a private and a public celebration which effects just one man and one woman, or even two families, but the whole of society.

Our reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah speaks of a very special day of celebration. One to which all people not simply the Jews are invited. The celebration, as we might expect, is centered on a feast which is more sumptuous than any earthly feast could possibly be. A feast which is not only organized by God but actually prepared by Him. While our reading speaks of this occasion as "the Day" what Isaiah speaks about here is the Day when the work of salvation has been accomplished by God. It is the Day when we human beings will be taken as God's bride to live with Him in eternal fidelity. It is a time of feasting since death is destroyed, tears are washed away, and there is no longer reason for reproaching the people.

Our Gospel reading from Matthew today seems to be a combination of two parables. The first is the parable about the king who prepared a wedding feast for the marriage of his son. As was the custom in those days an invitation was sent early before the final date was settled and it was then that people were expected to RSVP their acceptance or refusals. In our first parable, those who have accepted the invitation are told to come now for everything is prepared. For some reason, however, they refuse to come.

When a second reminder is sent some ignore it and go about their business, while some mistreated and even killed the messengers. As we might expect the king was more than insulted by their actions, and sends his army to destroy those who initially accepted his invitation. This parable undoubtedly is meant to underline the story of the king's generosity in inviting his subjects, and the callousness of his subjects in refusing to come to the banquet.

This is most probably the story told by Jesus as it is recorded in Luke's Gospel. It was a parable aimed at the chief priest's and elders. As descendents of Moses they accepted the invitation given on Sinai to be God's people, but when they are invited to an even deeper relationship with God through the Messiah, His Son, they refuse. In Luke's Gospel since the religious leaders did not accept this invitation they were excluded from the feast and others, the ordinary people, are invited.

In the hands of Matthew, however, this simple parable gets amplified into what we might call an allegory. In Matthew's version the wedding invitation becomes an invitation to the Kingdom of God. God gives the Banquet and Jesus is the Son for whom the Banquet is given. The servants sent out to gather the invitees are the prophets. Those who refused to come after accepting the invitation are the chief priests and elders; they after all were the same group that refused to listen to the prophets and often put them to death. Matthew wrote his Gospel after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70, and incorporates into his allegory the destruction of the city. Those who are then invited are the sinners, the Gentiles and non-Jews indicating the universality of salvation. Here ends the first parable.

The second parable is about the need for all the guests to have a wedding garment if they are to participate in the banquet. It is now the Apostles rather than the prophets who in this allegory go out to gather the new invitees. Unfortunately there is one guest who does not have a wedding garment and who the Father throws out. As harsh as this might seem to us, the wedding garment is meant to be a symbol for the conduct of one's life. In the early church, just as in adult baptisms here at the Easter vigil, the newly baptized were dressed in a white garment as a symbol that they had "put on Christ." Their garment was a sign that they were committed to live their lives according to Christ's values. Therefore, the man thrown out of the banquet is one who refuses to "live" the Christ he had put on at baptism. He is a sinner who refuses to repent. This second parable reminds us that our calling to the banquet of Christ imposes some obligations on us: turning from our sinfulness toward our God, our constant need for conversion.

Today as every Sunday, we are invited to the banquet of the Lord. Every Sunday after we have shaved, and put on our face we need to look ourselves squarely in the eye and ask if we are ready to put on our wedding garment? As we approach this banquet we must face the mystery that we are more than simply guests coming to celebrate the Son's marriage, we are for want of a better word, the Lord's betrothed. In this Sacrament of Unity we become one with Christ just as a husband and wife become mysteriously one in the Sacrament of Marriage. Each of us needs to ask ourselves, "*Am I living the life of the Christ that I 'put on' at baptism?*" None of us is perfect; we are all sinners who are, it is hoped, aware of our own sinfulness. In light of our own sinful imperfection, we each need to ask, "*Am I ready to meet the Lord and to receive the love and life He offers through His Body and Blood.*" If I can answer, "*Yes!*" then the celebration begins, and our joy should grow each time we come forward and say "*Amen.*"

Today we celebrate the dedication of these artworks that grace our sanctuary. We do so because this painting and these sculptures are not something separate from our celebration of the Eucharist. They are part of this Church so that they may help raise our hearts and minds to God as we celebrate the Eucharist. They are here to help us focus on who we are and what we are about as we come together in this Church. Like Peter in our painting painfully admitting his sinfulness with his out-stretched arms and by his declaration of love for the Lord, we too come to do the same. Like the Apostles gathering the great draft of fish, we too understand our call to be ministers gathering others to the Lord. Like Ignatius standing before the Cross, we understand our need for the Lord in the joys and sorrows of our own lives. And like Katherine Drexel in prayer we seek clarity on whom and how we should love. Like Mary and Joseph on our tabernacle we cradle the Lord in our hearts rejoicing that He has become one like us. These works help us focus on the mystery of the Incarnation and the mystery of our Redemption given to us so that the banquet of the Eucharist is always prepared calling us to celebration whenever we approach this altar.