

Contributed by Father Charles Fedy, C.R.

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TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
October 12, 2014
GATHERING TIME *(10-15 minutes)*

Introduction to the Word:

In Canada this weekend, we celebrate Thanksgiving Day and many of us will gather with family and friends for a wonderful Thanksgiving banquet. Since the Word of God for this Sunday uses the symbolism of a banquet to describe the kingdom of heaven, it might be helpful for us to reflect on our experiences of attending banquets. What makes a banquet a joyful celebration? Is it the food or the people with whom we are celebrating ... or both? It is probably both but which is more important? For me, it is the people. I prefer a simpler meal if I can share it with people whom I love, to a more extravagant meal which I share with strangers. What is God emphasizing when God uses the symbol of a banquet to describe the kingdom of heaven? I believe that it is our life of communion with God and with one another. When someone whom we love turns down our invitation to celebrate with us because of a tense or broken relationship, does this not take something away from the celebration? In the gospel, Jesus expresses God's disappointment when we turn down God's invitation to a celebration of loving communion. Could the wedding garment in our gospel be our love for God and for one another?

In our second reading, St. Paul speaks of the times when he was well-fed and the times when he was hungry. Thanksgiving Weekend is traditionally one of the times when we are invited to share from our abundance with those who go hungry. This too can be an expression of loving communion. You might have heard this story about the difference between heaven and hell. Both are described as a scrumptious banquet at which the people are dining with chop sticks which are a metre long. The people in hell are frustrated because they cannot get the delicious food into their mouths. The people in heaven use their chop sticks to feed one another and thoroughly enjoy the meal.

Warm-up Activity: The group members are invited to reflect on one or more of the following questions related to the theme of today's readings:

- a) Share your experience of the main difference between enjoyable banquets and ones which you wanted to gracefully exit as soon as possible.
- b) When someone significant to you chooses to be absent from a celebration, does this detract from the joy of the celebration?

Table of the Word

The Eucharist anticipates the End-Times banquet R.S.V.P.

One of words used to fully appreciate the Eucharist is a **meal**. It is a meal which anticipates the banquet in heaven in which we gather to celebrate our communion with God the Father and God the Son through the love and unity of the Holy Spirit, and our communion with one another. It is a meal at which we are nourished with the rich food of God's Word and the body and blood of Jesus. It is also a meal in which we are invited to participate in Jesus' victory over sin and death, which is a theme found in our first reading. The Eucharist is also a meal in which we give thanks to God along with Jesus for all of God's gifts and this is very important for us on this Thanksgiving Weekend. Is there a message in today's gospel about the importance of responding to God's R.S.V.P. to us with a joyful yes and of not excusing ourselves for little or no reason?

Let us pray
(together)

Leader: The table has been set, and all are invited to the feast.

Lord, Jesus, God's banquet is ready, and all are invited.

Christ Jesus, the veil will be lifted, and every tear wiped away.

Lord Jesus, our God has saved us and death no longer has its sting.

Lord have mercy.

Christ have mercy.

Lord have mercy.

Let us pray.

*Good and gracious God, you have invited all the peoples of the world
to the wedding feast of your Son. Awaken in us the excitement of your heavenly banquet. This we can best
do by remaining ever-sensitive and responsive to those around us who are most in need—
the neglected, the abandoned, the suffering, and those who are most deprived
of your love and compassion. This is the prayer we make
in Jesus' name. Amen.*

SCRIPTURE REFLECTION TIME (45 minutes)

(As Christians we believe that the **WORD** of God we hear proclaimed each Sunday is an empowering Word, and that God is present in the Word proclaimed. This is the Word that God wants us to hear today.)

FIRST READING (Isaiah 25:6-10a)

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.

And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken.

It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation. For the hand of the Lord will rest on this mountain.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

SECOND READING (Philippians 4:12–14, 19–20)

Brothers and sisters: I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. In any case, it was kind of you to share my distress.

My God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL (Matthew 22:1–14)

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

Once more Jesus spoke to the chief priests and Pharisees in parables: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come.

“Again he sent other slaves, saying, ‘Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.’ But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city.

“Then he said to his slaves, ‘The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.’ Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

“But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe? And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ For many are called, but few are chosen.”

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.**

Lectio Divina means “sacred reading” to which prayer is attached. It was a popular form of prayer in the early Church. This Word proclaimed today is God’s own Word, God’s way of speaking to you today through God’s own Spirit. So take a few moments to be quiet, allowing this Word you have just heard to touch you as you reflect quietly on the three readings. Is there a word or thought that somehow attracts you or has your interest? If so, simply identify it—no need to explain it—just identify it.

COMMENTARY:

What can compare with sharing a fabulous meal of scrumptious food and delightful drink, surrounded by those we love? Is it any wonder that this is the way we celebrate birthdays, weddings and anniversaries? It is no surprise, therefore that the celebration of a bountiful banquet became a favorite metaphor for the scripture writers to describe *the end-time*—a biblical term used to describe *this time we now live in*, as history moves toward the *revelation of the fullness of God’s reign*.

The interest in good food and fine wine, especially when shared with congenial friends, has always had a universal appeal. Food and plenty of it was regarded as a sign of God's favour and care for the Chosen People, and was usually present at the significant moments in Israel's history. When the reference to food was in the form of a *banquet*, it was meant to be of utmost importance. So the setting for Isaiah's first readings—a mountain banquet—is meant to serve as an invitation from God to *everyone*. It is the ultimate feast that God, as host, offers to all peoples and nations—"a triumphant overflow of divine joy and goodness" (Monika Hellwig, Scripture scholar and theologian).

The Gospel parable may have been directed originally toward those people who were most inclined to get Jesus' dander up, some of the Scribes and the Pharisees. If they had difficulty accepting him as Messiah, they certainly would be inclined to refuse an invitation to a messianic banquet in his honour. While the Gospel parable condemns them for their obstinacy, it also challenges all of us to give some consideration to his always welcoming invitation.

Matthew would have us approach this Gospel reading with a consideration of the whole world and all its resources as a kind of *divine hospitality*, as a magnificent festival, as a wedding feast of the Divine Word to which everyone is invited. If we think of the world and all creation in this fashion, the meaning of all history and of our very lives cannot help but be transformed. Today's invitation asks us to *share* the gifts and the fellowship, to rejoice in the joy of others but also to participate in the burden of their grief. For a person to *reject* or *ignore* such an invitation would be the equivalent of condoning common evils such as injustice, oppression, exclusion, and would be a failure to care (*ibid*). In a word, to reject the divine invitation is to turn a blind eye to the sufferings of the poor, the sick and the homeless.

In this light, we can begin to guess at the strange ending of the Gospel parable which really does not seem to fit—the ending about the man without the wedding garment. Denis Hamm s.j. views the wearing of the wedding garment as a symbol parallel to having one's oil-lamp ready for the advent of the Bridegroom. In other words, a person wearing the wedding garment is one who has fed the hungry, clothed the naked, and housed the homeless (1998), much the same meaning which Paul gives to "putting on the mind and heart of Christ." In his letter to the Galatians, Paul writes that if we are baptized in Christ we must be clothed in him. *Jesus* is the only adequate "banquet garment." It is his love and compassion that are *the clothing* we need to complete and unify everything else we wear. Every person on earth is called to this feast. But if any of us actually get there, it will only be because we have tried our best to live our lives "all decked out" with Christ in God (*ibid*).

(Allow about 5 – 10 minutes for the participants to react to the **Commentary** to identify a newly discovered insight or idea.)

Questions for Reflection and Discussion:

1. (Isaiah) "*The Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces.*"
 - a) How do you generally handle your "tears?" Do you try to avoid them, or do you consider them part of your life experience? Do you find any hope in them? Share your experiences.
 - b) When you give some thought to the "*final times*" (as in *the end-of-time*), what kind of images come to mind for you? Are they welcoming and comforting, or are they frightening?
 - c) What image of the "end-of-time" do you have that gives you the greatest joy?

2. (Philippians) “*Brothers and sisters, I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty.*”

- a) Most of us in our life's journey have experienced a time of desperate need, but also a time of abundance. In which of these experiences did you feel you are closest to your God? Comment.
- b) Is the generosity of your giving to the parish community determined primarily by whether or not there is some kind of return attached (as in being *tax deductible*)? Where do you give with no rewards?

3. (Matthew) “*He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come.*”

- a) We are told that in North America, the general average of active participants in Sunday's Eucharistic service is about 25 %. Do you think that the 25% have any obligation to minister to the 75% who seldom if ever show up? If so, what might these services look like?
- b) What do you consider some of the factors that contribute to people “not coming out” to services provided by the parish community, especially Sunday’s Eucharist?
- c) In recent years, the majority of people present come up to receive Eucharist. 25-30 years ago the number of people "not receiving" was significantly higher. How do we account for this change in behaviour? Do you think that this is a sign of the participants having a more mature spirituality, or of them have a diminished sense of "sin?" Share your opinions.

CARING-PRAYING TIME: (15-20 minutes)

1. Word for the Week:

**“One thing I have asked from the Lord, that I shall seek;
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.....”**
(Psalm 27:4)“

2. Suggestions (thoughts) for the week:

Bro. David Steindl-Rast says that learning to live life *gratefully* is a sign of a faith-filled person, and reflects a basic disposition that will keep a person close to the Lord. Lack of appreciation is very damaging to effective living (*Gratefulness, the Heart of Prayer*, 1984). Without a sense of appreciation, opportunities for personal growth go unnoticed. When we forget to say "thank you" for example, favours from others are less forthcoming. When we take people for granted, our relationships suffer. When our priorities no longer take account of what is truly important, we lose the focus we need to ensure a fuller and richer life. Failing to appreciate people is a statement of one’s lack of a sense of gratitude.

Something to think about (from **This Sunday’s Scripture):**

A little girl was walking with her father along a country road. The night was clear and the child was enthralled by the splendour of the sky all lit up with twinkling stars from one end to the other. After some moments of quiet she suddenly looked up to her father and said:” Daddy, I was just thinking if *this side* of heaven is so beautiful, how wonderful the other side must be?

3. Intercessions: (Response: Lord, hear our prayer)

Leader: Let us offer our prayer with confidence that God will care for our every need, for God knows what is best for us.

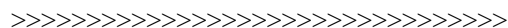
1. For our Holy Father, Pope Francis, for our Bishop and for all who exercise leadership in the Church, that they will always be guided by God’s Spirit of truth and love, we pray...
2. For our world leaders, especially those in the Middle East and Ukraine, that they will be committed to the pursuit of justice and peace, we pray...
3. For all Christians who are suffering persecution, and especially for those in Iraq and Syria, we pray...
4. For the victims of the ebola virus and for those who care for them, we pray..
5. For the hungry and homeless, that they will experience our compassionate response to their needs, we pray...
6. For all of us, that we will be grateful for all that God has given to us, we pray...
7. For healing for the sick, peace for the dying and God’s everlasting love for the deceased, we pray...

Let us pray
(together)

*May this gracious invitation
to share the wedding feast of your Son on the last day
be a constant reminder that all is grace—everything is gift—
and keep us from ever turning away any who come to your table. Rather let us work to fulfill the
vision of your prophet, and the mission of your Son: a welcome table open to all.
We ask this through Jesus your Son, who lives with you and the Holy Spirit,
God for ever. Amen*

With hands and hearts united in gratitude for God’s favours on us today, we pray that all those in our influence be moved to be open to your Word and your Spirit, while we pray united as one,

OUR FATHER...



Two kinds of morning prayer:

Those who wake up in the morning and say “**Good morning, Lord!**”
And those who wake up and say: “**Good Lord! Its morning.**”

Celebrating the Word, Resurrection Ministries of the Congregation of the Resurrection Ontario-Kentucky Province (including the former Resurrection Centre), 265 Westmount Road North, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada N2L 3G7. (Celebrating the Word was founded by Father Frank Ruetz, C.R., now deceased). For information or subscriptions: Toll Free: 1-877-242-7935. Email: theword@celebratingtheword.com website: www.resurrectionists.ca (**click on Our Ministries for Celebrating the Word**)
The Scripture version used in this commentary is the New Revised Standard Version (copyrighted by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA).