

TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Isaiah = i-ZAY-uh

A luminously poetic and uplifting reading offering a powerful vision of eternal life.

An intoxicating promise.

Let the image with which the reading concludes linger with your assembly by pausing for a long moment before saying "The Word of the Lord."

LECTIONARY #142

READING I Isaiah 25:6–10a

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah

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**.
On **this mountain** he will **destroy**
the **veil** that **veils** all **peoples**,
the **web** that is **woven** over all **nations**;
he will **destroy death forever**.
The **Lord GOD** will **wipe away**
the **tears** from **every face**;
the **reproach** of his **people** he will **remove**
from the **whole earth**; for the **LORD** has **spoken**.
On **that day** it will be **said**:
"**Behold our God**, to whom we **looked to save us!**
This is the LORD for **whom we looked**,
let us **rejoice** and be **glad** that he has **saved us!**"
For the **hand** of the **LORD** will **rest** on **this mountain**.

READING I

Isaiah 24 to 27 constitutes what scholars call the "Apocalypse of Isaiah," which concludes ten chapters of prophecies on the future of various nations. Although Isaiah has prophesied that Israel has lost favor with God and will witness the destruction of Jerusalem, he is also clear that nations at odds with Israel will also be subject to God's judgment. Chapter 24 compares Jerusalem to a vine that is withering away (Isaiah 24:7), and yet there is the hope that Israel's repentance will result in God's forgiveness.

In chapter 25, which our reading is from today, we read about a sense of universal eschatology. The Lord will welcome people from every nation to his mountain with a feast of abundant joy. After the Lord has destroyed all that is evil in the world, including the ultimate enemy found in death, he will gather to his holy place all those who heard his voice and turned from their wicked ways.

Isaiah says that God will destroy "the veil that veils all people." This "veil," that he also calls "the web," is an allusion to death. In the past, all peoples were tangled in the

powers of death, but now God "will destroy death forever." God will not only destroy death, but he will take away all pain and suffering; all the toils and struggles, the "tears" and the "reproach" experienced by his people will be no more. We may assume that the words "his people" has expanded to include representatives from every nation and not simply from Israel alone.

The passage concludes with a chorus of voices heralding the presence and power of God "to whom we looked to save us!" At the end of time, when this power of God is revealed, it will indeed be a cause for joy

For meditation and context:

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 23:1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6 (6cd)

R. I shall live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
In verdant pastures he gives me repose;
beside restful waters he leads me;
he refreshes my soul.

He guides me in right paths
for his name's sake.
Even though I walk in the dark valley
I fear no evil; for you are at my side
with your rod and your staff
that give me courage.

You spread the table before me
in the sight of my foes;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

Only goodness and kindness follow me
all the days of my life;
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
for years to come.

READING II Philippians 4:12-14, 19-20

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Philippians

Brothers and sisters:

I know how to live in humble circumstances;

I know also how to live with abundance.

In every circumstance and in all things

**I have learned the secret of being well fed and of going hungry,
of living in abundance and of being in need.**

I can do all things in him who strengthens me.

Still, it was kind of you to share in my distress.

My God will fully supply whatever you need,

in accord with his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

To our God and Father, glory forever and ever. Amen.

Philippians = fih-LIP-ee-uhnz

A conclusive reading that records the sentiments near the end of Paul's letter to the members of the early church at Philippi. Its tone is personal and thankful.

Slight pause between "being" and "well."

among all peoples who have recognized the truth of God and followed him.

READING II In the verses immediately prior to this passage, Paul praises God for the support given to him by the Philippians, both for their monetary support and their spiritual growth that is a testament to the continued spread of the Good News. The latter, more than donation sent to him, is sure to bolster his spirit during his time of imprisonment and be a greater witness to the truth of his preaching.

Paul uses this as an opportunity to remind the Philippians of a Christian's true source of support: God. While striving to be self-sufficient in his own ministry, and having experienced both times of having "humble circumstances" and "abundance," Paul has come to learn true dependence on God. Today's reading omits verses 15-18, which comment on the previous generosity of the Philippians to Paul when he was just beginning to preach the Gospel. These verses lead into a final statement by Paul regarding his confidence that God will provide the Christian community with what-

ever it needs. In all things, they are to look to Christ, as Paul has done throughout his own ministry.

GOSPEL Today's parable is addressed to the chief priests and elders gathered within the Temple precincts. Jesus opens the parable with the king's method of summoning guests to the wedding banquet for his son: servants are sent to extend the invitation. However, all the invited guests decline the invitation. The king tries a second time by sending other servants, who are not just to invite guests

Slight pause between "reply" and "spoke."

This parable seems straightforward but takes an unexpected turn, ending on a somewhat disturbing message. It could also be interpreted as having an ironic tone when one compares those who were invited originally with those who ended up actually celebrating with the king.

Even emphasis on "Tell those invited: 'Behold.'"

Don't overdo the king's rage.

The king's fixation on how this presumably vagrant wedding guest is dressed is yet another disturbing reaction, out of context and unrealistic to what the listeners expected to hear.

but are to lure them with words of bounty, describing what they would otherwise be missing. This time the rejection of the invitation is more forceful; while some are simply indifferent to it, others capture the servants and kill them.

The king's reaction is swift and severe. He sends an army to destroy the city of the guests who had been invited. Scholars believe this to be an allusion to the recent destruction of the Temple and the city of Jerusalem in AD 70, which the Matthean community would have experienced since this Gospel was compiled after that time.

GOSPEL Matthew 22:1-14

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

[Jesus again in reply spoke to the chief priests and elders of the people

in parables, saying,

"The kingdom of heaven may be likened to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son.

He dispatched his servants

to summon the invited guests to the feast, but they refused to come.

A second time he sent other servants, saying,

"Tell those invited: 'Behold, I have prepared my banquet, my calves and fattened cattle are killed, and everything is ready; come to the feast.'"

Some ignored the invitation and went away, one to his farm, another to his business.

The rest laid hold of his servants, mistreated them, and killed them.

The king was enraged and sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city.

Then he said to his servants, 'The feast is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy to come.

Go out, therefore, into the main roads and invite to the feast whomever you find.'

The servants went out into the streets and gathered all they found, bad and good alike, and the hall was filled with guests.]

But when the king came in to meet the guests, he saw a man there not dressed in a wedding garment.

Nevertheless, the king is unwilling to allow the abundant feast that he has prepared go to waste. Thus, he instructs his servants to go out "into the main roads" in order to invite whomever they might find. Jesus tells his listeners that these servants succeed in filling the hall with guests, both wicked and good. Here we are meant to understand that God, like this king, is willing to welcome anyone into his kingdom.

For this reason, the king's entrance into the hall and his reaction to the guest who is not dressed in the appropriate attire for a wedding feast is quite shocking. When

the king asks the man to explain himself for his attendance at the wedding feast, the man can give no reply. In response to his lack of "a wedding garment," the king has the man bound and thrown out into the darkness "where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth." This final portion of the parable is filled with symbols pertaining to eschatological judgment. The king's entrance into the wedding hall represents God's entrance into the world for its final judgment. The wedding garment is the sign of a person's repentance and participation in the Church; the man improperly dressed

The king **said** to him, 'My **friend**, how is it
 that you **came in here** without a **wedding garment**?'
 But he was **reduced to silence**.
 Then the **king** said to his **attendants**, 'Bind his **hands** and **feet**,
 and **cast** him into the **darkness outside**,
 where there will be **wailing** and **grinding of teeth**.'
Many are invited, but **few are chosen**."

This conclusion reinforces that sense of irony.

[Shorter: Matthew 22:1-10 (see brackets)]

stands for those outside the Church's membership who have not turned their hearts to God. While the kingdom may be open to both the good and the bad, only those dressed in the garment of salvation will avoid being banished from the feast. Finally, the last line from the parable suggests that being called or invited does not necessarily mean being chosen among the elect. Matthew's theology suggests that salvation depends upon some level of transformation in Christ; responding to the invitation requires a sign of belonging. S.W.