

Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time A/2011

The readings of this Sunday talk about the happiness that comes with God's kingdom and what it requires in order to be part of it.

In the first reading, the prophet Isaiah compares that happiness to a celebration that God will organize on his holy mountain for all the people of his beloved ones. That happiness will not deal only with human satisfactions, but it will also make the joy of those who belong to the Lord eternal.

That is the reason why God will destroy death forever from their lives and wipe all tears from their face. Because the situation will be such, God's people will not be disappointed. Instead they will rejoice and recognize that the Lord in whom they hoped has not let them down.

This prophecy of Isaiah allows us to better understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus talks about the parable of the wedding feast. First of all, we need to remember what a parable is. In fact, a parable is a figure of style in which images and symbols are used in order to communicate a truth or a message.

If that is the case, the global understanding of this parable refers to the history of the people of Israel in its relationship to the history of salvation. The parable refers also to the entry of the pagans within the Church and gives us some explanation why things happened that way.

In that perspective, the king in the parable symbolizes God. The sending of the servants to invite people to the wedding symbolizes God's multiple attempts through different prophets and the servants of the word to bring Israel to faithfulness and the acceptance of his message.

In spite of all God's attempts, even when God sent his son into the world for its salvation, the Jews did not repent, but rather they refused to accept him and more dramatically, they put Jesus to death. Because the people of Israel refused God's offer, God turned to the gentiles who massively accepted his invitation and believed in him and in his son, Jesus. The entry of the pagans and the gentiles in the Church is symbolized in the Gospel by all the peoples taken from the streets so that the wedding hall was filled with guests.

The question we have to ask now is this: When the Jews put Jesus to death, did God openly punish them by destroying their country? Historically, things did not happen this way. Here, we need an interpretation and an explanation. What happened, then?

In fact, historically speaking, it was in the year 70 after Jesus that the Roman army invaded the country and destroyed the temple. In the mind of many Jews and according to the popular perception, the temple was seen as the personification of the presence of God in the midst of his people and the symbol of the existence of the country. Therefore, its destruction was seen as the destruction of the country itself.

But what is interesting is the fact that Matthew, who writes in the years following the death of Jesus, gives a spiritual interpretation to this historical event. For him, then, the destruction of the temple was God's punishment and the consequence of the sins of the

people who, not only ignored God's repeated invitations to conversion, but also who refused to accept Jesus, the son of God.

What do we learn from this text? The first thing we learn from the Gospel is about the importance of salvation. In fact, God wants us to be saved. That is why he invites us to believe in him and receive the salvation. Even when we refuse and turn away from him, he always renews his offer so that we might not miss our salvation. The problem is, however, whether we accept to cooperate or whether we dwell in our stubbornness by rejecting his generous invitation.

The second thing we learn is about the value of the human person. The fact that the king sends his servants into the streets to gather people for the feast, without any preparation, shows us that for God it does not matter whether people are good or bad when he calls them. He loves anyone of us as we are. Therefore, no one can judge oneself unworthy of Christ. When the invitation is given, we have to seize it and make ourselves worthy of it.

The third thing we learn is the importance of making priorities in our life. In fact, what prevents people from responding to God's invitation is not always bad in itself. A farm, a business or a party, is all wonderful. However, as legitimate as these activities might be, they should not become an obstacle in our relationship with God. That is why it is important to make some priorities in our life and business, and to put God above everything else.

The last thing we learn is the importance of conversion. This is a permanent message for all the times and all the epochs. When we forget it; we will one day be surprised to become "the last" while for a long time we have been "first". That is the reason why one of the guests is rejected for not having an appropriate dress in the feast hall. The problem is not about the dress as a dress. Instead, the dress is the symbol of the disposition of heart of someone who has converted to God's grace of invitation. That is why in the end of the parable, there is a warning: "Many are invited, but few are chosen".

Let us pray, then, that God may help us to accept his invitation and to make ourselves worthy of his call. Like St Paul, let us trust God's grace upon us so that we may do everything with him who can strengthen us. May God bless you all!

Isaiah 25: 6-10a; Philippians 4: 12-14, 19-20; Matthew 22: 1-14



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Contact: www.mbala.org

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