

Twenty Eight Sunday in Ordinary Time A2017

The readings of this Sunday talk about the joy of the kingdom of God. They show that God brings his joy to our doors and into our hearts. They invite us to make ourselves worthy of God's joy by our way of living.

The first reading of Isaiah describes the joy that God will provide on his mountain for all the people of the earth. It expresses that joy in terms of a banquet organized by God. It shows the outcome of that joy as it will put an end to death and suffering. It also shows the recognition people will have that their trust in God was not in vain.

What is behind this text is the idea that God is the provider of his people and of all the things they can enjoy in the world. There is also the idea that the joy God gives is eternal because it destroys death and suffering. The last idea is relative to the truth that those who put their trust in God will never be disappointed.

This text allows us to understand what is at stake in today's Gospel as Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a wedding feast. First of all, the Gospel starts with Jesus speaking to the chief priests and the elders of the people about the kingdom of God that he likens to a banquet offered for the wedding of a king's son. It reports how the guests declined to respond positively to the invitation. It reports also how, because the feast was so important, the king made his servants bring in anyone they could find from the streets. After that, the Gospel reports on a strange incident that happened when the king entered the banquet hall and found someone in without a wedding garment. The Gospel finishes with a warning that states that many are invited, but few are chosen.

What do we learn from the Gospel? Today I want to talk about the joy of the kingdom of God. Let me start with a very simple observation. In fact, we all want to be happy and enjoy life as much as possible. All the different activities in which we are involved from our careers to our hobbies aim at making us happy and enjoy life.

Human experience has shown, however, that human happiness depends on circumstances and chances. Human experience has shown also that circumstances of life can change, like in the case of a change of fortune or a collapse in health. All that brings us to one truth, namely that human happiness and joy are fragile and short lived. God's joy, on the contrary, is eternal. The paradox, however, is that human joy, though fragile, is more attractive to human beings than God's joy, because it aims at the immediate satisfaction of human desires. God's joy, on the contrary, refers more to the long term of life.

In order to have access to that joy, one needs to respond positively to God's invitation and to act accordingly. This observation helps us understand why the invited guests in the parable preferred to go to their business than to respond to the invitation for the banquet. The joy of doing business took precedence over the joy of the kingdom of God. The goal of their life was set, not on a long term vision of things, but on the immediate satisfaction of their desires.

By talking about the long term and the short term vision of things, it does not mean that what we do in the present, like taking care of one's farm or business, are bad things in themselves. Not at all; it means only that those things, as good as they are, can become an obstacle in our relationship with God and an impediment to the joy of the kingdom.

Why? Because people can be so busy with the things of the present that they forget the things of eternity; they can be so preoccupied with the visible things that they overlook the invisible things which have to do with eternal life. The tragedy of life is that people can be so busy with making a living that they fail to make a life; they can be so busy with the organization of life that they forget life itself. In the end, it comes to one thing, namely that the second bests shut down the supreme bests.

Now, here is a question: why is the king keen to bring in the banquet hall other people, when the invited guests refused to come? He does so, because the feast is important and it should necessarily take place. Literally, it means that God wants absolutely that we take part in his joy. He is not happy when we cannot have salvation. It means also that salvation is so important that as long as people are not saved, God is not happy. He wants us to take part in the joy he has prepared for us from all eternity.

That is the grace he offers us when he calls us to belong to him. That is the reason why in the parable, the king sends his servants to collect people, bad and good alike, from the streets. But, what a generous hospitality as to be unexpectedly invited to a feast! It is like being surprised with a phone-call to dine at the white house with the president of United States. What a magnificent grace as that!

Here is another question: If people were taken from the streets and without any preparation, why, then, make a big deal for that one who did not have a suit for the feast? I believe that everybody understands that, historically speaking, the parable refers to the entry of the gentiles in the Church as they did not expect at all to be part of God's people.

However, I have to say that, though the door is open to everyone, once people enter, they have to live up to God's expectations. If they have been loved, in turn, they also have to show love. That is why grace creates responsibility. It would be a mistake to anyone to think that he has been called by God and to continue to live as he lived before. We cannot go on living the type of life we lived before we met Jesus. We must be clothed in a new purity and a new holiness and a new goodness. The door is certainly open, but it is not open for the sinner to come in and remain a sinner, but in order to become a saint.

That is why I think also that the way people come to anything shows also the spirit in which they come. If we go to visit a friend's house, we do not go in pajamas we use when we sleep or do it in clothes we use when we are working in the garden. If that is true, then, I believe that God gives us an opportunity today to think about the clothes we wear when we come to Church. Are they worthy of him? Can we go to an invitation for a wedding feast with the clothes we wear when we work in a garden? Can we make a distinction between the Church and the garden? Is it possible to think also about the clothes we wear when we go to the Church? Now, let me ask God to bless us and protect us so that we respond with love to the love he has shown us in Jesus Christ. God bless you all!

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

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