

SUNDAY READINGS

READ AT HOME

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year A

11 October 2020



Collect

May your grace, O Lord, we pray,
at all times go before us and follow after
and make us always determined
to carry out good works.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Readings and Commentaries

No reader of the gospels can fail to be struck by the number of times Jesus is sharing a meal. He appears never to have refused an invitation, no matter who the hosts or guests. His indiscriminate dining did not go unnoticed; it led to the accusation that he was “a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners” (Matthew 11:19). On occasion he likened his ministry to a wedding feast, with himself as the bridegroom (Matthew 9:15).

Banquets and wedding feasts appear often in the scriptures as attractive images of human fellowship and communion with God. We have one of each today, but with a twist. Isaiah paints a picture of a great feast to which the Lord God invites all peoples. It foreshadows the messianic times which will overcome the tyranny of death. The wedding banquet of the gospel, however, is bitter-sweet. It turns into a trial at which judgement is passed.

Something of this is captured in the dialogue that prepares us for communion in the gifts of the Eucharistic table. “Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb”, we hear, and in response we each admit, “Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof”.

A reading from the prophet Isaiah**25:6–10****First Reading**

On this mountain,
 the Lord of hosts will prepare for all peoples
 a banquet of rich food, a banquet of fine wines,
 of food rich and juicy, of fine strained wines.
 On this mountain he will remove
 the mourning veil covering all peoples,
 and the shroud enwrapping all nations,
 he will destroy Death for ever.
 The Lord will wipe away
 the tears from every cheek;
 he will take away his people's shame
 everywhere on earth,
 for the Lord has said so.
 That day, it will be said: See, this is our God
 in whom we hoped for salvation;
 the Lord is the one in whom we hoped.
 We exult and we rejoice
 that he has saved us;
 for the hand of the Lord
 rests on this mountain.

Isaiah's image of a banquet of rich food and fine wines is wholly attractive. All peoples and nations gather at Mount Zion, the holy place on which "the hand of the Lord rests". All are welcome at the feast; all are one at this joyful celebration of salvation. The power of death has been definitively undone; there will be no more tears, no more shame.

The reading may be familiar to at least some members of the congregation. For obvious reasons it is sometimes chosen for funeral services and for All Souls' Day.

There is no inherent difficulty with the reading. There are no strange place names or uncommon words. More positively, the text has been set out in the lectionary in short clear lines. This should encourage readers to take the time to proclaim each unit of meaning distinctly. The tone of the reading matches the image of the banquet; it is one of bountiful joy and happiness.

Responsorial Psalm**Ps 22**

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

The Lord is my shepherd;
 there is nothing I shall want.
 Fresh and green are the pastures
 where he gives me repose.
 Near restful waters he leads me,
 to revive my drooping spirit. **R.**

He guides me along the right path;
 he is true to his name,
 If I should walk in the valley of darkness
 no evil would I fear.
 You are there with your crook and your staff;
 with these you give me comfort. **R.**

You have prepared a banquet for me
 in the sight of my foes.
 My head you have anointed with oil;
 my cup is overflowing. **R.**

Surely goodness and kindness shall follow me
 all the days of my life.
 In the Lord's own house shall I dwell
 for ever and ever. **R.**

Responsorial Psalm

We have already prayed Psalm 22/23 twice so far this year – on the fourth Sundays of Lent and Easter. The key difference today lies in the response: "I shall live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life". This picks up the first reading's theme of life beyond the reach of death. Living "in the house of the Lord" also has overtones of generous hospitality and a place at the table. Readers should announce the response in such a way that congregations can repeat it surely and gladly.

As noted on the previous occasions it is used, this much loved psalm presents a challenge for readers. Apart from dealing with verses of different lengths, they should proclaim the all-too-familiar words as if they had just been discovered. They need to bring a firm freshness to the text and avoid any hint of sentimentality.

The images are strong and plentiful: shepherding, green pastures, restful waters, the valley of darkness, a banquet, the Lord's own house. One after the other they build up a heart-warming sense of God's personal and protective love. This should be a joy to read.

**A reading from the letter of St Paul
to the Philippians 4:12–14, 19–20**

I know how to be poor and I know how to be rich too. I have been through my initiation and now I am ready for anything anywhere; full stomach or empty stomach, poverty or plenty. There is nothing I cannot master with the help of the One who gives me strength. All the same, it was good of you to share with me in my hardships. In return my God will fulfil all your needs, in Christ Jesus, as lavishly as only God can. Glory to God, our Father, for ever and ever. Amen.

**A reading from the holy Gospel
according to Matthew 22:1–14**

Jesus said to the chief priests and elders of the people: 'The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a feast for his son's wedding. He sent his servants to call those who had been invited, but they would not come. Next he sent some more servants. "Tell those who have been invited," he said, "that I have my banquet all prepared, my oxen and fattened cattle have been slaughtered, everything is ready. Come to the wedding." But they were not interested: one went off to his farm, another to his business, and the rest seized his servants, maltreated them and killed them. The king was furious. He dispatched his troops, destroyed those murderers and burnt their town. Then he said to his servants, "The wedding is ready; but as those who were invited proved to be unworthy, go to the crossroads in the town and invite everyone you can find to the wedding." So these servants went out on to the roads and collected together everyone they could find, bad and good alike; and the wedding hall was filled with guests. [When the king came in to look at the guests he noticed one man who was not wearing a wedding garment, and said to him, "How did you get in here, my friend, without a wedding garment?" And the man was silent. Then the king said to the attendants, "Bind him hand and foot and throw him out into the dark, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth." For many are called, but few are chosen.']

Second Reading

Today's reading is the fourth and final passage that we hear from Paul's letter to the Philippians. It comes from the concluding section of the letter. Readers will find it useful to check out the couple of verses that precede today's text. They are included in the reading from the NRSV.

Verse 10 makes passing reference to the Philippians' concern for Paul. This links in with other mentions of gifts brought to Paul from Philippi by Epaphroditus (see 1:5, 2:25 and 4:18). But no sooner has Paul acknowledged this help than he declares how free and independent he is: "I know how to be poor and I know how to be rich too".

This thought prompts him to declare: "There is nothing I cannot master with the help of the One who gives me strength". Many have found inspiration in this saying.

The passage ends with a short prayer and doxology. We do not hear the final three verses of the letter which convey greetings. The spirit of the reading is that of the letter as a whole: affectionate, joyful and peaceful. This is how it should be proclaimed.

Gospel

It isn't clear whether we have one or two parables today. Most, if not all, of the reading is the parable of the wedding feast. The final part of the text (verses 11–14) may be seen as an extension of the original parable or as a separate additional parable. For the sake of simplicity let us assume the former.

This is the third in the series of parables Jesus tells in the tense atmosphere of his final days in Jerusalem. Opposition to him has gathered momentum. Rejection and condemnation lie ahead. The lines of battle have been drawn. All this is reflected in the accusing tone of the parables. Judgement is being passed on those who had the responsibility to listen and to lead.

The gist of the parable is obvious enough. The "chief priests and elders of the people" to whom all three parables are addressed are those accused of refusing to accept the king's invitation. The guests who fill the wedding hall are the despised nobodies who are not righteous observers of the Law. Like its predecessors this parable has continued to sound a warning to self-righteous religious leaders in every age.

There are some disturbing notes. The behaviour of the king is modelled on the ruthless tyrants of the ancient world; this makes it difficult to simply equate the king with God. The final section (or additional parable) is also puzzling. On the face of it the guest without the wedding garment is harshly treated. Presumably this served as a warning for community members not to become complacent.

Concluding Prayers

Almighty and all-merciful God,
lover of the human race, healer of all our wounds,
in whom there is no shadow of death,
save us in this time of crisis;
grant wisdom and courage to our leaders;
watch over all medical people
as they tend the sick and work for a cure;
stir in us a sense of solidarity beyond all isolation;
if our doors are closed, let our hearts be open.
By the power of your love destroy the virus of fear,
that hope may never die
and the light of Easter, the triumph of life,
may shine upon us and the whole world.
Through Jesus Christ, the Lord risen from the dead,
who lives and reigns for ever and ever.
Amen.

Holy Mary, health of the sick, pray for us.
St Joseph, guardian of us all, pray for us.

(Most Rev. Mark Coleridge, Archbishop of Brisbane)

or

Gracious God,
We give thanks anew for your providence and presence.
We prayerfully seek your grace, amidst COVID-19 here and overseas.
We pray for those in need of healing.
We pray for your peace with those who are anxious or grieving.
We pray you will continue to strengthen and sustain
all those who are serving in response.
We pray for your Holy Spirit's discernment
amidst the many choices and decisions
facing our national, community and medical leaders.
We pray we each might see quickly what more we can do
to help those who are vulnerable.
This prayer for our nation in the family of nations,
with all that is on our hearts,
we gather now and pray
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

(Ecumenical prayer from the National Council of Churches. We have been invited to pray this prayer at 7pm each day.)