

Twenty-Eighth Sunday, October 9, 2011

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First Reading: Isaiah 25:6-10

The theme of the eschatological banquet is an expression of God's continuous construction of his kingdom. The conviction of faith: "*Behold our God to whom we look to save us..., let us rejoice and be glad, that he has saved us*", far from being an invitation to be over-confident, is an invitation to collaborate in *God's Project of Life* which is the vocation of any believer and of the church as *instrument of salvation*.

Second Reading: Philippians 4: 12-14, 19-20

The letter to the Philippians is full of missionary confidence and optimism. Paul is missionary, because he has been *touched* by God, and feels that, to use his own words, Christ is now "living in him". That is the root of his missionary life. His strength is the strength of Jesus who has *found* him first. "I have the strength for everything through him who empowers me." All baptized, all missionaries, are *empowered* by the Spirit of Christ.

Gospel: Matthew 22:1-14

This Gospel continues the central theme of the banquet, presented already by the first reading of the prophet Isaiah. "The kingdom of God may be likened to a king who gave a wedding feast." The banquet (first reading), or the wedding feast (Gospel), are meaningful images for the kingdom of God, the aim and purpose of God's mission.

A mission which starts in the Love of the Father, incarnates in the divine-human love of Jesus, and remains with us in the loving and effective presence of the Holy Spirit. As we see from the Gospel and the image of the banquet to which, at the end of the parable, God invites "whomever you find ..., bad and good alike". God's love invites us all, people of all nations and all cultures.

Acceptance or non-acceptance is left to each one of us who hears this word, as we do today. But again, there can be no banquet, no wedding feast, no entering the kingdom, without the spirit of service and love (take the towel and serve), which characterises every disciple and missionary of Christ. "My friend, how is it that you came here without a wedding garment?" With that very clear statement, Jesus wants to remind all his followers: whoever wants to follow him to his kingdom, has to, as Paul had said before, vest himself "with the life of Christ himself" (Galatians 3:27) who made himself a servant of all.

Homily Notes

The *missionary dimension* of this Sunday's readings is already clear right from the first reading, taken from the prophet Isaiah. We are at the beginning of another missionary month, October, and the readings lead us up, we could say, towards the high point of the universal celebration of *World Mission Sunday*, on the second-last Sunday of this month.

The sign of the banquet for all, which is used to explain to us God's offer of life and abundance (John 10:10), is a preferred image of God's ever-inviting love. Mission is indeed a question of knowing God's abundant love, but as Paul says in his letter to the Romans, how can people implore him, "if they do not know him".

The Church has only one aim during this missionary month: to invite all disciples of Christ, all baptised who want to live their baptism, *to share* with all mankind, with every human person, the *Good News of God's love and life*.

We can keep in mind that, when Mathew writes his Gospel, the young Church is already a martyr church (James, Stephen and others). Christians have already become a sign of contradiction, especially in the eyes of the traditional Jewish world (synagogue), which rejects this *new* way of preaching Christ as the *Risen Lord and Messiah* that was announced in the Old Testament.

The *refusal* to attend the wedding banquet, gives Matthew the welcome opportunity to insist on the preferential love of God for the poor and marginalised of any time and any place. In their higher sensibility for the inviting goodness of God, the poor and marginalised of any time and any place are above all people of hope and confidence, able to realise that the Kingdom Jesus offers through the Church's mission in history, is really the *pearl*, that somebody finds and then he goes and "sells everything he has and buys that pearl." (Matthew 13: 45)

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