

A Bible Bullet (aimed at the heart)

Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle A
Isaiah 25:6-10; Phil. 4:12-14; Matt. 22:1-10

When our Western minds imagine a wedding scene, our experience does not provide details to help us understand what was typical in Jesus' time. Next Sunday we read about the invitation to the wedding feast, so let's look at commentaries giving us an historical background. To begin, historical data from The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times provides insights,

First, marriages were arranged. Hopefully, love followed. It was very much a legally binding bargain where dowries were decided. Aside from the blessing pronounced over the couple, a wedding was nonreligious. The procession at the end of the day was the high point. The bridegroom set out from his home to fetch his bride from her parents' home. Both bride and groom were adorned with jewels and finery even if these had to be borrowed for the event. The groom then escorted his bride to his home amid music and singing from the guests. In wealthy families, the guests were provided with special wedding clothes to wear.

A commentary offered by Sr. Joan Mitchell, CSJ, for the publication Sunday By Sunday provides insight into the original intent of the Gospel writer. With credit and gratitude to the scholarship of Sr. Joan, and with the added input from biblical scholar William Barclay, I offer this reflection.

In the time of Jesus, when invitations to a great celebration like a wedding were sent out, the exact time was not indicated. Preparations were initiated, accommodations readied, and the foods cooked. When all was ready, the servants were again sent out to tell the guests to come. This was a common procedure and the celebrating lasted about a week.

In this story we read in this gospel selection, the guests were not angry with the king, just too busy to join in his celebration although they had adequate notice. This constituted a horrible insult to the king. As a result, others who were not among the first chosen were invited next.

The king desired to share his joy with his friends but they were too busy with the ways of the world to join him. The king will have his celebration! Others will be invited in the place of the first.

Now, let's look at the symbolism:

The king = God

The king's son = Jesus (bridegroom, messiah)

The first servants = the prophets

The first guests = Jews who do not recognize Jesus as messiah

The wedding feast = the union between the king's son and Israel

The king's troops = the Roman soldiers who put down the Jewish rebellion in 70 AD, destroyed the Temple, and ended Temple worship. This is seen as the punishment of those who did not accept Jesus as messiah.

The second servants = missionaries of the Good News to all nations

The second guests = those from many nations who do accept Jesus, basically, the Gentiles.

What we see developing here is an ongoing judgment of the priests and elders that began with the parable of the two sons from two weeks ago, continued with the parable of the tenants last Sunday, and continues in this week's story of the wedding feast.

For us today, the feast is a Eucharistic banquet. Does the initial invitation that welcomes us to our First Eucharist cause in us a constant readiness to celebrate at each opportunity? Have we grown too busy with the agendas of daily life to realize the gift of a Eucharistic Messiah? Only deep and true introspection will reveal the elder and the priest in all of us.