

The Wedding Feast, the Lamb, and the Kingdom

On the Readings for Sunday, October 15, 2017

October 14, 2017 Carl E. Olson The Dispatch



Readings:

- Isa 25:6-10a
- Psa 23:1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6
- Phil 4:12-14, 19-20
- Matt 22:1-14

It is impossible to overstate the importance of marriage as both an institution and a metaphor in the Bible. Marriage is depicted as a sacred bond in which a man and woman enter into a covenantal, nuptial bond and the “two of them become one body” (Gen 2:24). The relationship between God and his people is often depicted as a marriage, especially in the writings of the Old Testament prophets. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* notes, “Seeing God’s covenant with Israel in the image of exclusive and faithful married love, the prophets prepared the Chosen People’s conscience for a deepened understanding of the unity and indissolubility of marriage” (par 1611).

Many of the prophets—especially Isaiah and Ezekiel—wrote of a future time when God would finally free his people from oppression and suffering, and culminate

his covenantal love in a joyful marriage feast. Today's Old Testament reading is from a section known as "the apocalypse of Isaiah" (Isa 24-27), which describes the coming of God to destroy the enemies of his people and deliver, once and for all, Israel from the forces of evil. Isaiah described a "feast of rich food and choice wines" on Mount Zion in which "all peoples" partake; nations are united and all sorrow has ceased. This is the same wedding feast described by John the Revelator in his Apocalypse: "Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory. For the wedding day of the Lamb has come, his bride has made herself ready (Rev 19:7ff).

However, in between the Old Testament prophecies and the future fulfillment there is the here and now. Yes, the kingdom is here, but has not yet been fulfilled and completed; the King has come, but has yet to come again in glory for all the world to see and acknowledge as King of kings (Rev 19:11-21).

The kingdom, Jesus told the chief priests and elders, is like a king who "gave a wedding feast for his son." This invitation was not just a matter of social interest for Jews, but of immense responsibility. Those invited to such a marriage feast made certain their calendar was clear and that they attended. Failure to do so was not just a grave insult, but grounds for severe punishment. It was common for two invitations to be sent: the first to let guests know of the approaching marriage; the second on the cusp of the celebration, which would usually last a full week.

The guests in the parable, however, were indifferent or, even worse, hostile to the servants delivering the invitation. Those who were indifferent, wrote St. Gregory the Great, were caught up in worldly activities. "One person is concerned with earthly toil", he wrote, "another devoted to the business of this world. Neither takes notice of the mystery of the Lord's incarnation." And, he adds, "They are unwilling to live in accordance with it." The first guests are the people of Israel, blessed with the witness of the prophets, yet mostly unmoved by their message, if not openly antagonistic to it. The angry king—who is, of course, God—destroyed their city, a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70.

The invitation to the marriage feast is then extended to whomever the servants can find, a reference to the apostles preaching to the Gentiles. The new Israel, the Church, is aptly described as containing "bad and good alike". But those who think all goes well at this point are in for a surprise. The king angrily questions a guest who is without a "wedding garment", and then casts the speechless man into "the darkness outside". Indifference, again, is a problem, but the deeper issue is that of unworthiness.

Many are called, but it is those who are faithful, filled with charity, "holy and without blemish" (Eph 5:27; cf Matt 7:21), who are chosen. The marriage supper of the Lamb awaits, but we must be clothed with "righteous deeds" (Rev 9:8).