

11 October 2020

Twenty-Eight Sunday in Ordinary Time

Isaiah 25:6-10; Philippians 4:12-14, 19-20

Like last week's Gospel story, this one also has the historical setting of the frustrations the early Christians, who were Jewish, had with their fellow Jews who would not accept Jesus as the promised Messiah. They are like the invited guests who refused to come. Maybe Matthew emphasizes the "wailing and grinding of teeth" to shock people into giving Jesus a second look. In any event, it is clear that the King is choosing against the elite of his day and welcoming the outcast. One commentary I read stated that **in making this choice to associate with the lowly of society, the king was effectively cutting his ties with the elite—a bold move—but an encouraging one for all of us who limp through life in our lowliness and need God. We are invited into the family of God.**

Hearers of this parable are often **troubled by the way the king treated the one fellow** who was almost forced to come in and then violently tossed out for not wearing the wedding garment. **That whole conundrum was solved for me when I learned that typically at a wedding of such prominence, wedding garments would be provided for everyone. So, the man's offense was refusing to wear one,** refusing to enter the spirit of the celebration. As the moral of the story goes, All are invited but few are chosen—not everyone responds with love and gratitude to the invitation. **WE are all invited to partake of the Kingdom of God, basing our lives on Faith, Hope and Love. Do we?** Or does selfishness get the better of us. "Nah, I don't feel like putting that garment on—what's wrong with my jeans in t-shirt?"

The other readings are really important. The first is among the most common chosen for funerals, and the second contains one of the most quoted of St. Paul's words.

I was at a funeral visitation on Thursday for Deacon Larry Agema, and **ran into our Bishop**, Bishop Callahan. I was so glad to see him because I had been wanting to thank him for some courageous and, in my estimation, wise decisions he has made. The coronavirus and the presidential election have been major stressors in his life. And so I acknowledged that these were not easy days for him **and I thanked him for his leadership and before departing I said, "I'm confident in you, because I know how much you lean on the Lord." He nodded and said, "That's true, I do do that."**

Leaning on the Lord, leaning on God, leaning on Jesus, is what is affirmed in the first two readings today. Isaiah envisions a people of faith who have gone through years and years, generations and generations of hard times, oppression, hunger and weakness. And on this one great day they are stream to God's holy mountain and rejoice that they are healed and everything has been made right and they say a beautiful thing: Behold our God to whom we looked to save us. Let us rejoice and be glad that he has saved us." Friends what a joy it is to celebrate a funeral for someone for whom that statement rings true. I am continually inspired by people who look to God to save them—not in some passive way but by living in the expectation that love will win the day and so they join the fight.

Which brings us to St. Paul's most quotable words: **"I can do all things in him who strengthens me."** It's a quotable phrase because we all have times of great weakness and need the strength of God. In these times **we have our sick and those who have lost jobs**, and worry about paying rent next month. **We have among us our seniors who weaken and grow old and many husbands and wives for whom fun days in the sun are distant memories in the face of their new role of caretaker. We have parents of**

children with special needs coming to accept this unanticipated role. ...to name just a few among us who need God's strength.

You who have suffered more than I have could offer greater wisdom. I will just say that in observing people, it is the ones who can affirm that God loves them and that God calls them to respond with love each day to these challenges, that fare the best. They look to God to save them, to encourage them, to guide them. In my own little sufferings, when for example I'm feeling a lot of grief or fear, it helps me to ask the basic question "Why am I here?" As much as I like to be happy, that's not why I'm here. As much as I like to be comfortable, secure and cared for, that's not why I'm here. I'm here to serve God and deepen my relationship with God. Knowing this, I can better live one day at a time, knowing that in my joy or in my pain I can serve God by loving others.

I think this is what St. Paul knew and what we need to learn and remember: That **there is a power that is ever greater than our pain, stronger than our weakness, and braver than our fear. And we are invited to come to that power, to the table of God, to grow strong on him so we can live for him.**