

1st Wednesday Advent I & II

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/120220.cfm>

ISAIAH 25:6-10A

*On this mountain the LORD of hosts
will provide for all peoples a feast of rich food
and choice wines, juicy, rich food and pure,
choice wines.*

*On this mountain he will destroy
the veil that veils all peoples, the web that is
woven over all nations; he will destroy death
forever.*

*The Lord GOD will wipe away
the tears from all faces; the reproach of his
people he will remove from the whole earth;
for the LORD has spoken.*

*On that day it will be said: "Behold our God,
to whom we looked to save us!
This is the LORD for whom we looked;
let us rejoice and be glad that he has saved
us!"*

*For the hand of the LORD will rest on this
mountain.*

PSALM 23:1-3A, 3B-4, 5, 6

R. (6cd) I shall live in the house of the Lord all
the days of my life.

*The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
In verdant pastures he gives me repose;
Beside restful waters he leads me;
he refreshes my soul.*

*He guides me in right paths
for his name's sake.
Even though I walk in the dark valley
I fear no evil; for you are at my side
With your rod and your staff
that give me courage.*

*You spread the table before me
in the sight of my foes;
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.*

*Only goodness and kindness follow me
all the days of my life;
And I shall dwell in the house of the LORD
for years to come.*

MATTHEW 15:29-37

*At that time: Jesus walked by the Sea of
Galilee, went up on the mountain, and sat
down there.*

*Great crowds came to him,
having with them the lame, the blind, the
deformed, the mute, and many
others. They placed them at his feet, and
he cured them.*

*The crowds were amazed when they saw
the mute speaking, the deformed made
whole, the lame walking, and the blind
able to see, and they glorified the God of
Israel.*

*Jesus summoned his disciples and said,
"My heart is moved with pity for the
crowd, for they have been with me now
for three days and have nothing to eat.
I do not want to send them away hungry,
for fear they may collapse on the way."*

*The disciples said to him, "Where could
we ever get enough bread in this deserted
place to satisfy such a crowd?"
Jesus said to them, "How many loaves do
you have?" "Seven," they replied, "and a
few fish."*

*He ordered the crowd to sit down on the
ground. Then he took the seven loaves
and the fish, gave thanks, broke the
loaves, and gave them to the disciples,
who in turn gave them to the crowds.
They all ate and were satisfied.
They picked up the fragments left over—
seven baskets full.*

X

“Never taste the bitter...doesn’t know what is sweet.”ⁱ

That’s from my grandma. She immigrated from Cornwall at the turn of the previous century. You really have to hear this again, but imagine it coming from a 4’11” British accent:

“Never taste the bitter...doesn’t know what is sweet.”

Today, we have this beautiful interplay between Isaiah, David the Psalmist, and Matthew. It all harmonizes in one opus even though the Spirit played across a thousand years that spanned the time between them.

We are given the joy and satisfaction of great feasts:

- *... a feast of rich food and choice wines, juicy, rich food and pure, choice wines.*
- *You spread the table before me in the sight of my foes.*
- *... who in turn gave them to the crowds. They all ate and were satisfied.*

Allow me to reflect on the great feast of just six days ago: Thanksgiving. It was a COVID Thanksgiving- a lot the same, but with around fifty less of my closest relatives. It was just Jan, my son, Matt, and me. My wife said she never cooked Thanksgiving for just three. Well, she still hasn’t.



She made a feast that lasted for days. It was magnificent and the three of us, with great enthusiasm, offered up our thanks to Providence, for our meal, for our family and for our lives so blessed even during these trying times.

I remember when I first sat down at the table. The smells had my stomach growling at me in anticipation.

Part of the reason is that weeks before my wife (in an effort to squeeze some longevity out of me) put me on the South Beach Diet. It was effective. Some superfluous weight was lost, that bloated sluggish feeling left and I feel more vital. I would actually be hungry whenever I sat down to fresh fruit, vegetables and meat or fish.

And when the aroma of Thanksgiving hit me that day, allow me to be dramatic when I say it was like incense being offered up to our Father in Heaven. I can’t remember a meal I’ve enjoyed more, what with being in loving company and my having been better prepared physically ...and gastronomically, for such a feast.

This yearning, this longing, this hunger is what Isaiah presents us. The Jews of his time were all too familiar with suffering, destruction and death. Their cousins to the north in Israel had been vanquished in a particularly devastatingly way by the Assyrians and Judah could be next. Yet, Isaiah prophesies hope:

... the LORD of hosts will provide for all peoples a feast of rich food and choice wines, juicy, rich food and pure, choice wines.

... he will destroy death forever.

Jesus is the fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy. Jesus recognizes the needs of the people. They were in deep distress: *the lame, the blind, the deformed, the mute.*

...and he cured them.

While *the crowds were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the deformed made whole, the lame walking, and the blind able to see*, from 700 years before, Isaiah says, *This is the LORD for whom we looked; let us rejoice and be glad that he has saved us!"*

The people followed Jesus into the wilderness for three days in search of healing. They were hungry. Jesus miraculously provided a feast out of seven loaves and a few fish. I feel free to say "feast" as 4000 were fed. *They all ate and were satisfied. They picked up the fragments left over—seven baskets full.*

Can we take a moment and imagine what that meal was like? What must have been one's joy when a brother was made to see, or a sister made to walk? And when the gnawing in one's stomach grew as provisions dried up, imagine how that feast satisfied. Would it not seem as luxurious as Isaiah's prophecy?

The Psalm leads us through the same journey. It starts with a valley dark with evil. The pilgrim receives courage and protection from the Lord, his shepherd. She is led to *verdant pastures of repose, beside restful waters.*

This Advent can be the season where we embrace our fears with hope in the promises of Isaiah and David, the Psalmist. May we find our hope and fulfilment in Jesus' coming to heal us, feed us and be our satisfaction.

Jan and I have the opportunity during this COVID slow-down to embrace the penitential, reflective potential of Advent. Our fulfilment is not found in satiation. I have already discovered that my grazing habits never let me experience hunger and therefore never the satisfaction of that hunger.

I intend to explore more deeply the sacred art of fasting. Thomas Ryan, author of the book by the same name, *The Sacred Art of Fasting: Preparing to Practice*, concludes his book with:

*Fasting as a religious act increases our sensitivity to that mystery always and everywhere present to us.... It is an invitation to awareness, a call to compassion for the needy, a cry of distress and a song of joy. It is a discipline of self-restraint, a ritual of purification, and a sanctuary for offerings of atonement. It is a wellspring for the spiritually dry, a compass for the spiritually lost, and inner nourishment for the spiritually hungry.*ⁱⁱ

Oh, to hunger and behold Him who refreshes my soul.

My grandma was right:

*“Never taste the bitter...doesn’t know what is sweet.”*ⁱⁱⁱ

X

ⁱ Mabel Yelland Hall, 1888- 1985

ⁱⁱ Thomas Ryan, CSP; *The Sacred Art of Fasting: Preparing to Practice*; Skylight Paths Publishing, p. 163-164

ⁱⁱⁱ Mabel Yelland Hall, 1888- 1985