

FROM FR. CHRIS ALIMAJI'S DESK

***Reflections on the Eucharistic Feast (the Wedding Feast)***

On this Twenty-Eighth Sunday, Year A, our Bible Readings are from Isaiah 25:6-10a; Philippians 4:12-14; and Matthew 22:1-14. Our Song of Praise is Psalm 23. **Come to the Feast!** Our theme of the vineyard and its workers over the past few weeks has prepared us to come to the stage we are at today, in celebrating a feast in which everyone is invited. Our journey together in this set of parables began with the Landowner (the Lord) who sent workers into his vineyard and paid them the same amount. Then he requested his two sons to go out and work in the vineyard, to which one obeyed and the other did not. **And last week we reflected on the harvesting that take place in the vineyard after our plants have gotten ripe. We take from our farms and bring our produce into our barns in the barnyards. Notice that I frame these sentences in the present continuous tense.** Today, therefore, is the feasting with our produce, celebrating joyously from the produce of our labors. If you are with me this much, then you have **“come this far by faith, leaning on the Lord”** as the African American song tells us. You are clearly seeing our journey together, as we call it in catechism (CCE), our dancing together in the presence of the Lord, and being fed by our God. **We gather in church for the celebration, our festival, our feast, our worship, our Eucharistic meal with the Lord to which everyone is invited to come to the table the Lord has set for us.**

Let me ask the question: **Why was Jesus proposing the various aspects of the parables of the Vineyard? What had he in view by putting forward the parables?** As I said in one of my Reflections, Matthew's Gospel has a whole line up of them. From the Landowner (the Lord) hiring people to work in his vineyard, to its culmination in the Eucharistic Feast, can you see much more clearly the picture the Lord Jesus was painting? **He was preparing us for the Eucharistic festival which is a foretaste of the celebration and the worship and the adoration in the Kingdom of God, which St. John described in the Book of Revelation, reading from Chapters 4:8-11, 5:6-14, 7:9-17, 11:15-19, 15:1-4, 16:1-7, 19:1-8 and following.** That is why in my parishes, I teach the song: “Thou art worthy ... to receive glory and honor and power ...” (Rev. 4:11), and some others adapted from the verses above, using them for adoration and benediction. When I hold the Seminar on the Book of Revelations in my various parishes, which I can also give in other parishes when invited, I make sure that I explain the spirit and purpose of this Book to my parishioners and audiences. That is what we are called to and invited to participate in, my dear fellow Christians that read my Reflections. **Learn and practice to join in Eucharistic adoration.**

The Prophet Isaiah (cf. 25:6-10a) saw the Lord of hosts gathering all peoples on the mountain to a feast, providing them with a feast of juicy, rich food and pure, choice wines. At this feast, there will be no weeping, no dying, no tears, only a joyful celebration in the presence of the Lord. **That feast the prophet saw is a feast of rejoicing and gladness that our God has already saved us. It is a feast of life, a celebration of life.** Hence, “we rejoice in the salvation of the Lord who saved us.” We read the passage often during funeral services. It is up to the homilist to explain it nicely to console the mourners. The psalmist found great joy in this feast that the prophet Isaiah descried and says, “I shall live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.” How else should we describe this feast, other than journeying with the psalmist as he takes us along with him. The psalmist sees the Lord as the Shepherd who leads us to green pastures. **We are in the pastoral life in the vineyard of the Lord. Here we eat and drink and our cup overflows. There is no more thirsting, and we are no longer in want. We have set our feet along the right paths. The Lord himself spread the table before us, having anointed our head with oil (in baptism and confirmation surely!), and the enemy is jealous. As for me, I know that “Only goodness and kindness**

**follow me all the days of my life” for the hand of the Lord guides me; (cf. Ps 23).** Hence, I infer that the Apostle Paul says to us that, ‘In whatever circumstances we find ourselves, our needs will be met in Christ Jesus.’ (cf. Phil. 4: 12-13). I am rejoicing in this reflection, and I believe that my readers would rejoice too, because these readings are describing the meaning of the Eucharistic Feast which the Mass is for me and for us, the Christians. That is why I entitled this reflection with this theme.

The Parable of the Wedding Feast in today’s Gospel as peculiar to Matthew, interestingly brings in the last judgment connotation, as well as the Wedding Feast of the Lamb, where Christ invites all to the messianic banquet in heaven; (cf. Lk 14:15; 22:28-30; Rev. 3:20-21; Mt. 25:31-46), and Isaiah’s portrayal in today’s First Reading, of final salvation under the image of a banquet, (cf. Is. 25:6). As we bring in the sheaves, the song I have used these Sundays, everyone is invited to the feast. **Each week you respond to the invitation to gather in the church (the holy place, the sacred space) to hear the word of God. We are the special guests to the wedding feast of the Son.** We know who the King is, and who the Son is. This is pleasing to the Lord. The King will dance for seeing us in his feast. He is generous with his invitation and the meals prepared, rich and juicy food which we enjoy at **the table of the Word** and **the table of the Eucharist** for our spiritual nourishment. As the king has done, so must we do. We are God’s emissaries now, inviting all to the feast. We must persist in inviting others, even when they resist. We know the outcome for those who refuse. It is often associated with violence, including violence for lamb that was slain. Let us rejoice because our foreheads are marked and sealed with the blood of the lamb, (cf. Rev. 7:3-4). **Our Mass is a foretaste of the heavenly banquet.** In baptism, we “put on” Christ, to clothe ourselves in him, becoming the face of Christ for others, being generous and kind, including our repentance, remaining in grace, and living the life of grace and holiness. That is our appropriate dress for the heavenly banquet. We put on Christ when we sacrifice our own desires and wants for the needs of others.