

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year A

28th Sunday of Ordinary Time

First reading:

(Isaiah 25 .6-10)

The Banquet of the Lord

The reading begins with the image of the messianic banquet, the banquet that the Lord is preparing for the end of time, an image which Jesus takes up in the gospel story of the wedding feast. After the first lines, the image changes to the removal of the mourning veil and the destruction of death, every tear wiped away.

In the earlier parts of the Bible, the dead are thought to lead a wretched existence in Sheol, a life that is no life, a sort of half-existence without power or substance, when the dead cannot even praise God. Gradually, Israel comes to realize that God's love is so enveloping and so enduring that God cannot desert or abandon his faithful even in death. Even death cannot cut off the faithful from God.

This is one of the crucial passages where the permanent, saving strength of God's love is expressed. Speaking to the Sadducees (who did not believe in the Resurrection) Jesus will say: 'God is the God not of the dead but of the living.' Paul will say, 'Neither death nor life can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus.'

Question:

What is heaven like? Is this too simplistic an image?

Second reading:

(Philippians 4.12-14, 19-20)

The glory of God

Paul has reached the final greetings of his letter. Even when he is writing to his beloved community at Philippi, from whom alone he would accept gifts, Paul is anxious to maintain his independence.

In the ancient world, as in the modern world, a favour demands a return favour: 'There is no such thing as a free dinner'! So Paul points out that he could manage without the gift they have given him, since all his strength comes from God.

But he also wishes them the blessing of the fulfilment of all their needs from the glory of God in Christ Jesus. This is an incomparable blessing, whose awesome value is obscured by our careless use of the term 'glory'.

The glory of God is a term frightening in its richness. No human being can see God and live, but Moses can for a moment glimpse God's glory - after which his face is so seared that he must wear a veil over it. It is a glory that, by contrast, fills Isaiah with dread at his own sinfulness, which makes Ezekiel fall to the ground. It is the experience of the limitless power and majesty of God.

Question:

Am I ready to face the glory of God?

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year A

Gospel:

(Matthew 22.1-14)

The Wedding Banquet

A wedding is a time of joy and completion after long preparation, a time of love and of complete satisfaction. In Judaism at the time of Jesus, the coming of the Messiah is often compared to a wedding feast.

The marriage feast at Cana must have been some party! At Mary's request, Jesus produced 900 litres of wine. The Letter to the Ephesians teaches that the love in a human wedding is only a pale shadow of Christ's love for his bride, the Church.

In this story of the royal wedding, however, two things go drastically wrong. First, the original wedding guests refuse to come. Not only do they refuse, but they brutally maltreat the innocent messengers, and the king (who must stand for God) relentlessly burns down their city. This must be an adjustment to Jesus' story, applying it to the Sack of Jerusalem, captured and burnt by the Romans in 70AD, a few years before Matthew was writing.

Second, the man who has no wedding garment is slung out. A wedding garment is a standard Jewish image for works of generosity expected of every faithful Jew. For us Christians, too, the story constitutes a double warning.

Question:

Are we alert and listening for God's call? Do we rest secure in being called Christians and leave the dirty jobs to others?
