

28th Sunday of Ordinary Time – October 15, 2017

- The central image in today's readings is feasting, eating well. Following on Thanksgiving weekend, we should all be in a good frame of mind to appreciate this image.
- Isaiah's description of the salvation God will bring to all peoples begins with a feast of rich food and well-aged wines on a mountain-top.
- Paul in the second reading talks about both the good times when he has been well-fed and the lean ones when he has been hungry and expresses his faith that God satisfies every need.
- The psalm too includes a feasting image. We don't often associate Psalm 23 with feasting. It begins with the iconic line: "The Lord is my shepherd" and provides some of the most comforting passages of scripture, but nestled within it is the image of feasting: "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies".
- And then there is the Gospel reading in which Jesus describes the kingdom of heaven in terms of a king inviting people to a wedding banquet. But the story he tells takes a rather startling turn: the invited guests do not heed his invitation and so, what would normally be a joyous event turns rather bleak.
- The guests mistreat the king's servants and, in turn, the king sends his troops to destroy the guests and has his servants go out into the streets to find other guests. And then the story concludes with the wretched guest who does not show up properly dressed.
- This might all seem quite incongruous, but it aligns with the parables we have heard over the past few weeks about people responding (or not) to requests from someone in authority.
- What are we to make of this parable? Make sure you show up when someone invites you to dinner?
- Or is it presenting yet another facet of our relationship to God, and perhaps to each other?
- Last week Raphael drew our attention to a false sense of entitlement that sometimes grows up when we take things for granted and forget where they came from.
- Today I would suggest the readings call our attention to what God asks of us.
- It is easy to think of God as someone *we* ask. Prayer is often characterized that way. We pray *for* things. But it should really be a two-way communication: we also need to listen to hear what God is asking of us.

- The requests in each of the parables today and in the past few weeks are about more than harvesting grapes or attending banquets; they also speak generally about the requests God makes of us in our own lives.
- This requires us to first of all discern what God is asking of us. There are many ways of doing this, but it is basically about looking at the things you do (or do not do) and asking whether God is calling you to do them differently, or to do more or to do less.
- I recently went on a retreat. It was my first one in about 40 years. I spent two days in the company of a group of other men thinking about what I do in my life and trying to connect it to the spirituality I have developed within my Catholic faith.
- One of the things I thought about was responding not only to God, but to the people who surround me my family and friends, the people I work with, the students I teach.
- Am I answering them, or am I pushing them away? Am I recognizing requests around me, even those that may be made silently through circumstances that cry out for help?
- I find it easy to get caught up in things I think are important, or the things I like doing, and use these things as an excuse for not responding to the people around me. So one thing I need to work on is listening and watching.
- And perhaps also remembering that answering a request need not be a burden or a hardship. Sometimes it is easier to meet the request than we think at first.
- This has happened to me quite recently with one of my students who is from outside Canada. He has lots of questions about the course material, more than other students because he did not grow up in Canada. When he asked for an appointment outside of class hours, I was apprehensive. My initial reaction was to say I cannot tutor you in this course.
- But I nevertheless met him and found that his questions were well organized and did not take long to answer. They were also very good questions that I suspect many other students had too. In talking to him, I got a better sense of what I wanted to convey to my students generally.
- In today's parable we don't know why the guests made lights of their invitations. Did they think they had better things to do? That they would find the banquet boring or the company oppressive?
- Or did they just not appreciate that they were being invited to a feast that would satisfy their hunger for a lot more than food?
- Perhaps the lesson here is that we should try to see the requests God and others make of us as things that can enrich us as much as they benefit those making the requests.

JMK