

A reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah.

Pause - and look up at the assembly

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines,
of rich food filled with marrow,
of well-aged wines strained clear.
And he will destroy on this mountain
the shroud that is cast over all peoples,
the sheet that is spread over all nations;
he will swallow up death forever.
Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces,
and the disgrace of his people
he will take away from all the earth,
for the Lord has spoken.
It will be said on that day,
“Lo, this is our God;
we have waited for him, so that he might save us.
This is the Lord for whom we have waited;
let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.
For the hand of the Lord will rest on this mountain.”



PAUSE for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:

The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

A reading from the letter of Saint Paul to the Philippians.

Pause - and look up at the assembly

Brothers and sisters:

I know what it is to have little,
and I know what it is to have plenty.

In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret
of being well-fed and of going hungry,
of having plenty and of being in need.

I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

In any case, it was kind of you to share my distress.

My God will fully satisfy every need of yours
according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

To our God and Father be glory forever and ever. Amen.



PAUSE for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:

The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL READING – A 28

The Lord be with you.

And with your spirit.

A reading from the holy gospel according to Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord

Once more Jesus spoke to the chief priests and Pharisees in parables:

“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son.

He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come.

Again he sent other slaves, saying,

“Tell those who have been invited:

“Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.”

But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them.

The king was enraged.

He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city.

Then he said to his slaves,

“The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy.

Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.’

Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, and he said to him,

‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?’

And he was speechless.

Then the king said to the attendants,

‘Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’
For many are called, but few are chosen.”



The GOSPEL of the LORD.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

SCRIPTURES IN DEPTH

Reading I: Isaiah 25:6-10a

Just as the vineyard became, since the song in Isaiah 5, an accepted symbol for Israel as the people of God in salvation history, so our present reading made the great banquet a classic symbol of the consummation of God's saving purpose in history.

But this idea of the eschatological banquet was not created by Isaiah. Its roots can be traced back to earlier Canaanite literature.

The Qumran community took up this symbolism in the institution of their daily meal, and Jesus also put it to various uses: in his conduct in eating with outcasts; in his parable of the great banquet that forms the gospel for today; and above all in the saying at the Last Supper that he would no longer feast with his disciples until he could do so in the consummated kingdom of God.

Responsorial Psalm 23:1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6

It is instructive to compare the use of this psalm here with its use on the sixteenth Sunday of the year in series B. There the emphasis is indicated by the refrain, which focuses on the image of the shepherd.

Here, since it is in response to the reading from Isaiah on the messianic banquet, the emphasis lies upon the Lord's house or temple, where he prepares the banquet table and invites his people to share the blessings of his kingdom.

The third stanza marks a shift in imagery from God as shepherd to God as host at his banquet.

Reading II: Philippians 4:12-14, 19-20

According to the partition theory, these excerpts from Philippians would be from Letter A, the thank-you note for the relief they had sent to Paul while he was in prison, probably at Ephesus (see the commentary on Reading II for the twenty-fifth Sunday of the year in series A).

Paul seems a trifle embarrassed to accept any gift at all. C. H. Dodd spoke of Paul's "sturdy bourgeois independence," which made him a little too proud to accept help readily in this way. Or was it just stoic detachment (Phil 4:12a)? Perhaps it is more theologically based than that.

Paul knows that the existence of an apostle is marked by the sign of the cross—in facing hunger and want as readily as plenty and abundance.

There is a slight undertone suggesting that the Philippians had inadvertently deprived Paul of boasting in his sufferings. But Paul is too gracious to say so, and although admitting that he could have gotten along very well without it, he nevertheless thanks them for their kindness.

It is a pity that Phil 4:18 has been omitted, for there Paul gives the Philippians' charitable act a theological meaning: it was a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.

Gospel: Matthew 22:1-14

It is interesting to compare the long and short forms of this gospel. The long form really consists of two parables spliced together—the parable of the great banquet and the parable of the man without a wedding garment.

That the combination is secondary is shown by Luke (14:16-24) and by the Gospel of Thomas, where the great banquet occurs on its own, without the addition of the wedding garment.

The combination produces an unrealistic effect, for one inevitably asks, How could the poor man have been expected to have a wedding garment if he had been hauled in unexpectedly from the street? The answer is that in the original parable he had not just come in off the street. In its original form the (parable of the) wedding garment stood on its own. The original opening of it was then lost when it was joined to the parable of the great banquet.

Although it is difficult to be certain, it seems likely that the evangelist was responsible for combining the two parables. He interprets the gathering in of the ragtag and bobtail from the streets allegorically as Jesus' prediction of the subsequent Gentile mission, and adds the second parable as a warning against their admission on too easy terms.

It is unlikely that the evangelist was requiring the circumcision of the Gentiles, since that issue had been settled long before at the apostolic conference (Gal 2; cf. Acts 15).

Matthew may be inserting a bit of propaganda in favor of the apostolic decrees which, according to Acts 15, were promulgated at the council, but which in all probability were enacted at a later conference while Paul was away (see Acts 21:25).

As an original parable of Jesus, the story of the man with the wedding garment, like many other parables, would be an exhortation to readiness in face of the coming kingdom of God. The invitation came sooner than the man expected, and it caught him unprepared. Woe to a person in such a case!

The shorter form, as we have noted, consists of the parable of the great banquet by itself. A study of the parallels in Luke and in the Gospel of Thomas shows that the version in Matthew is highly allegorized.

Again, the allegorization has produced some quite unrealistic features. It is most unlife-like—and Jesus' parables are lifelike, even if they often end on a note of surprise. What invited guest would not only spurn the invitation but actually kill the servants who brought it? And what host would send out his troops not only to destroy those murderers but to burn down their city?

Clearly, these details reflect the events of 66-70 C.E., the Jewish war and the destruction of Jerusalem. With these accretions, the parable is used by the post-70 C.E. church as an interpretation of the debacle of those years—they were a punishment of Israel for rejecting the gospel, for persecuting the Christian messengers, and for putting them to death.

But this is not the end of the allegorization. Comparison again with Luke and the Gospel of Thomas shows that in Matthew the parable has been transformed in other ways.

In the other versions it is simply a great banquet given by a private individual; but in Matthew it is the story of a wedding feast given by a king for his son. The king is equated with God, and the son with Jesus, the Messiah.

This, of course, is an entirely natural post-Easter reinterpretation, but if we want to ask what Jesus meant when he told the parable, we have to disregard these later elements.

It is a judgment on Jesus' contemporaries who rejected his invitation to the coming kingdom, and an assurance to the outcast, with whom Jesus celebrated the great banquet in advance.

Reginald H. Fuller