

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)
(Isaiah 2:6-10 / Matthew 22:1-14)
11.10.2020

Dear brothers and sisters,

Every day, and even several times a day for many of us, we pray: “Father, may your kingdom come”! When we pray to God with these words, what do we mean? We know that the kingdom of heaven is the manifestation of the loving and saving presence of God in our midst through Jesus Christ. In Jesus, God reigns. In Jesus, the kingdom of heaven has come. In Jesus, we already enjoy the presence of the Kingdom of heaven here and now, and we shall enjoy it for ever, over and beyond death.

Jesus’ contemporaries used different images to speak of the kingdom of heaven. One of these images was that of a banquet. This image was inspired to them by texts of the Old Testament like today’s first reading from the prophet Isaiah.

In today’s gospel passage the kingdom of heaven is compared to a wedding banquet. This evokes the idea of celebrating the covenant of love between Christ and the Church, and, over and beyond the confines of the Church, between Christ and all those who were created out of love through him by the Father.

A banquet is a happy event in which is enjoyed “rich food, food rich and juicy, and fine wines, fine strained wines”. A banquet is a source of joy which we have to share with all those who are invited and participate in it. The presence of the Kingdom of God among us is a joyful social event; its presence creates joy and communion. The presence of God’s kingdom among us is the presence of Christ himself. It is He who gives us joy, a joy to share with others.

It is important to meditate upon the reality of the banquet as a source of joy and solidarity, and all the more so at the present time, in our terrified world held in the grips of the coronavirus pandemic. Covid-19 is an invisible and dangerous evil, but it is not ‘the god’ who reigns over us. For this reason, it will not have the last word. God is greater and stronger than Covid-19. The presence of God in our lives is a source of joy even in the midst of sadness. In the case of Covid-19, the presence of God is a source of joy because with our collaboration, the Lord will defeat the virus. God will have the last word. Let us not forget the full picture.

Covid-19 invites us to pray more and more, with hope. It invites us to trust in God who is with us to save and free us. We are not alone. The joy, created by the Lord’s loving and saving presence to us, must help us overcome our fears awakened by the threat all around us. Covid-19 invites us also to care for one another, especially for those who are sick or vulnerable. Covid-19 is an opportunity for us to learn how to love and respect in every concrete way all our neighbours. With Covid-19, we are called to discover what human solidarity means. Innumerable examples are brought to our attention: just think of all that is happening in hospitals or in our neighbourhoods.

It is important to meditate upon the reality of a banquet, as a source of joy and solidarity, and all the more so in a world which has to deal with Brexit and the like. Brexit is testimony to the fact

that Great Britain wants to take its distance from the other countries of Europe, precisely at a time when interconnectedness and solidarity are so essential. The good news of the kingdom is that we are all called to walk and work hand in hand; certainly not to isolate ourselves, thinking that we are superior to others, greater than them, that we don't need them. The kingdom of heaven is in our midst. Let us not be an obstacle to its coming.

It is important to meditate upon the reality of the banquet, as a source of joy and solidarity at a time when the United States of America are deeply divided, so strongly armed for all kinds of eventuality and yet at the same time clearly not ready for a presidential election. In the circumstances of our world today, we have to ask the Lord to send leaders to his people, women and men of vision, artisans of peace who will have at heart to work for the common good of all God's children. Aggression, sadness and individualism are called to give way to joy and the joy of true life together.

At the end of today's parable, there is the attitude of the king which seems so difficult to understand. We see people dragged from the street and brought into the wedding hall with one of them blamed for not being properly dressed for a wedding: "How did you get here, my friend, without a wedding garment?" The reaction of the king seems unfair, because time had not been given to that man to dress properly for the wedding. To understand the attitude of the king, we have to ask ourselves if the wedding garment is not the symbol of something else.

We are all invited to enter into the kingdom, into the covenant of love Christ has made with the whole Church and with each one of us. But it is not enough for us to answer the invitation by entering into the wedding hall. It is not enough to have an entrance ticket. Our baptism is necessary but not enough. Even our participation in the Eucharist on a Sunday morning is not enough. Our response to the invitation to the wedding feast should be to do the will of God day after day, night after night, until our last breath. It is the work of a lifetime. We have to answer the Lord's invitation by an active, personal and continual response to God's word. The wedding garment is a symbol of that answer; it is a symbol of a life lived in conformity with God's word as it has been revealed to us by Christ. From this perspective, the reaction of the king is understandable. We can be in the wedding hall without living the exigencies of our vocation.

We are not called to be a Christian for just one hour on a Sunday morning or simply the other times we go to church, but every day and every hour of our lives. We have to try to live every instant of our existence in the light of our Sunday Eucharist. There are no reserved seats in the kingdom, but there are places which we have to occupy day and night. It is true that we are Christians from the day of our baptism; but it is also true that we have to become a Christian day after day, we have to don the wedding garment every day, as long as we breathe here on earth.

We are gathered together to celebrate the Eucharistic banquet. The Lord offers himself to us here as food and drink. He gives himself to each one of us. Let us prepare our hearts and minds to answer the Lord's invitation addressed to each one of us. Christ comes to us victorious over sin and death and offers us a share in his victory. Let us allow what we celebrate to inform the whole of our lives, bringing us joy in the midst of our darkness and loving concern for and solidarity with all our brothers and sisters in humanity. Through our lives, little by little, the kingdom of heaven will come, if only we say 'yes' to its coming.