

Twenty-Eighth Sunday In Ordinary Time – 10/15/17

My dear people of God:

These past few Sundays, we have been listening to a lot of stories about grapes and vineyards. Now, we are talking about wine. If we really want the wine that God provides, we need to continue choosing Christ. That was the theme that I proposed to you last Sunday: that of choosing Christ. It would not be difficult to choose Christ because the reward is priceless. But we need to be constant in choosing Him.

And we have Saint Paul as our model for choosing Christ in either good times or in bad times. He says: Brothers and sisters: "*I know how to live in humble circumstances; I know also how to live with abundance. In every circumstance and in all things I have learned the secret of being well fed and of going hungry, of living in abundance and of being in need. I can do all things in him who strengthens me. Still, it was kind of you to share in my distress. My God will fully supply whatever you need, in accord with his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father, glory forever and ever. Amen.*"

Paul knew how to choose a life according to current circumstances. In his letter, he is demonstrating his belief in the God who also chooses to support His followers. All that Paul is saying is: God will always reward our right choices.

Paul embraced the "initiation" that he received from Christ, and *all what that initiation meant*. Paul shares with us the lesson of contentment he had learned after choosing Christ. He does not speak of something speculative. NO. He speaks of an empirical and experiential knowledge. He ascribed such contentment to the power and grace of Christ.

At this point, my brothers and sisters, it would benefit us immensely if we allow Paul's words to sink into our hearts and touch us. Let us pray for patient submission and hope when we are abased. Let us pray also for humility and a heavenly mind when we are exalted. It is a special grace to have an equal temper of mind always.

Paul is teaching us never to lose comfort in God, when we are down and in a low state; never to distrust His Providence, never to murmur or complain. We need to bear all this without discontent.

Equally, we must never be proud, or worldly when we are full and abundant, and comfortable. God expects us to observe temperance and sobriety, to cherish gratitude for the mercies which He had showered us. But alas, my brothers and sisters: this is the harder lesson which we must learn during fullness and prosperity compared to the lesson during affliction and want.

But thanks be to God: Through Jesus Christ we have the grace to do what is good, and through Him we can expect the reward; and as we have all things by Him, let us do all things for Him, and to His Glory.

The Responsorial Psalm beautifully declares what each believer who chooses Christ can expect: *I shall live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life.*

The acclamation before the gospel adds flavor into today's theme: *May the Father of our Lord Jesus Christenlighten the eyes of our hearts, so that we may know what I s the hopethat belongs to our call.*

Isaiah in the first reading declares that there is so much in store for us: choice wine, food aplenty, tears being wiped away, and beholding God. The rewards far outweigh the sacrifices.

Now, to the gospel: In today's gospel, Jesus offers us another parable about the kingdom of heaven. Please know that this does *not mean a kingdom located in heaven* but a *community of believers on earth who accept the rule of God and who hope to find a place eventually in heaven*. Matthew often uses the term "kingdom," and it is sometimes translated as "reign." Please understand that God's kingdom is not a political kingdom. God is not a tyrant.

In Matthew's gospel, Jesus tells of a king who prepares a great marriage feast for his son. None of those who were first invited chose to come. The king sent his servants to remind those who were invited to attend. But they seized the servants and treated them in a shameful manner, showing dishonor to the king. The wrath of the king was kindled: "*But when the king heard about it, he*

was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city” (Matthew 22:7-8).

So, a second group was invited. They came. But one man is singled out because he did not have a wedding garment: *“But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless”* (Matthew 22:11-12). Something was missing. At this point, you may be tempted to ask in his defense: *Why is the matter of the wedding garment so important? The poor guy was plucked out of the street. He had no time to change his clothes. What is the matter with this king?*

And worse is the fact that the king’s order was extremely harsh: *‘Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth’* (Matthew 22:13).

Before studying the implications of the story, let us learn a few elements in a Jewish wedding banquet back then. It would be helpful to grasp the wisdom of this story.

Wedding guests were expected to wear a long strip of cloth. *For our purposes, we will call it a scarf.* Such a scarf was not expensive. It was the ordinary scarf that people used to cover their faces and protect their eyes during sandstorms. At the wedding banquet, the guest must wear it on his shoulder and extend it to his neighbor to his left. If everybody wore a scarf, there would have been a long uninterrupted bond in a row of guests. This was intended to create a fraternal bond among the guests under the roof of the host.

Any guest who forgot his scarf was provided one at the door during the washing of the feet. Anybody who refused to wear one was absolutely denied entry into the banquet hall.

Now, back to the story: How did the man gain entry into the hall? He must have gained entry by deception. When the king confronted the man, the man remained speechless as if he was in utter defiance to established norms and practices - more so, in the palatial hall. In the mind of the ordinary Jew, this man entered the hall with no intention to become a brother to his fellow guests. He did not want to bond with the people in the assembly. His presence was an intolerable offense. It was an insult to the host. He was - as it were - aligning himself with those who were invited first but refused to come. He

came to the banquet table with no intention for fraternity by choice. This was the most willfully defiant attitude of the deepest kind.

My dear people of God, Christianity is the complete opposite of the attitude of this man. Christianity is about aligning with people, bonding with people, loving people. God's call or invitation is not a light matter. Salvation, pictured here by the glory of the marriage feast, is a beautiful, precious and a once-in-a-lifetime matter. The garment is absolutely a grave matter for our King.

The Book of Revelation can help us appreciate more deeply what the garment in the parable means. Chapter 9, verses 6 to 9 of the Book of Revelation states: *"Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear."* Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God's holy people. Voila! There it is. It is spelled out for us. At this marriage of the Lamb(Jesus) to His Bride(Church), she has put on fine linen, which is defined as the righteousness acts of the saints. This requires repentance of our sins, acceptance of the sacrifice of Christ to purge our sins, and receiving the Holy Spirit to enable us to choose to live in obedience to God's will.

Haughtiness and arrogance arising from knowledge about the faith does not guarantee salvation. What matters most is choosing to accept this bond with no intention of quitting. By doing so, this kingdom will be ours, because it is also the choice of the King that we should enter into that Kingdom. Amen.