

Rectoría San Juan de Dios
XXVIII Sunday of Ordinary Time, Cycle A
Is 25, 6-10; Ps 23; Phil 4, 12-14.19-20; Mt 22, 1-14
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Let Us Be God's Dinner Guests

Jesus continues to clarify the understanding of the Kingdom of Heaven; in a special way, He stresses to the leaders of the people that the imminence of the Kingdom makes all relationships new, especially relationships with God.

With the image of the wedding banquet, we can seat ourselves at the celebration as invited guests, knowing that we have a place at God's Banquet. God wants us to sit at His table; He wants us to be His dinner guests, but it is necessary to respond and to be dressed for the occasion.

How important it is in our lives today to take our place as dinner guests! Especially now when many in the world don't respond to God and act the same way as those invited guests who ignored the invitation to the banquet and killed the king's emissaries. Ours is a world that sits at the table of its own appetites and satisfies itself with poor nourishment.

We want to be part of the Kingdom, a banquet where the meaning of the celebration is not found in my artificial paradise where I gratify myself, but in the quality of the meeting with the guests and the host, in the gift of God who brings our relationships to fullness. It is God who seeks us for this meeting; it is He who seats us at His table, He who seeks our nearness, face to face with Him.

In order to be God's good dinner guests, we can take these three steps:

1-Let us value the banquet.

To understand that God has prepared a place for us allows us to always confirm our participation in it.

It is obvious that those of us who attend Mass, the Eucharistic Banquet, Sunday after Sunday, value the banquet of God; we understand that in the Eucharist we are seated at the table with Jesus and, through a personal encounter, we satisfy our hungers, regain the strength to continue our life, and renew our hope of fullness in God. But it is necessary to affirm the value that we give to the banquet.

Isaiah encourages us, in the first reading, by drawing a beautiful picture of the love with which God prepares this encounter. It is not an informal or improvised get-together; it is a celebration prepared with much anticipation. Imagine that God has prepared it thinking about us; He has visualized us in our places. He places humanity at the table as the center of creation. He wants it as a partner for sharing life and love. At this banquet, important things will happen: God will make things clear to us, He will destroy our death and wipe away our tears.

Those who listen to Isaiah understand *wiping away tears* from the image of a child who cries in the arms of his parents. We could understand it this way today. A child who runs tearfully to find refuge in his father or mother, who hides his wet, weepy face on the chest of his father or the lap of his mother; a child who happily finds relief when his parents dry his tears with kisses and caress him so that he knows he is not alone, that nothing bad will happen, that he has someone who has the answer for him.

To be God's good dinner guest, we must value His banquet.

2- Let us understand hungers.

Only someone who has gone hungry knows how to behave at a banquet where there are many guests and where there is a lot of food.

St Paul teaches us gratitude for relief in poverty. God comes to our aid; He alleviates our hungers for love, for forgiveness, for justice, and for peace. The guest seated at the banquet table can discover that those who share the table with him have had other needs; they have also been hungry. Through that common experience, there is solidarity; it equalizes them and makes them brothers.

The one who is seated at the banquet table knows about hungers. He understands that he has not come there in order to fill his own stomach nor to be individually happy in his artificial paradise, but to live the meaning of communion. He finds strength in the joy of the banquet, not in what he takes personally from what is on the table, but in the richness of the encounter with others, under the gaze of the host as he walks around the room.

Someone who knows about hungers can be a wonderful dinner guest, worthy and agreeable, someone who gives and receives generously in favor of others.

3-Let us dress up.

To be properly dressed for the banquet means to enter with dignity, with loyalty to the host, affirming with our presence the gift of our person in favor of the host.

One does not enter the banquet in order to say that he is doing a favor for the person who invited him, but to

acknowledge the significance of a fine and elegant banquet, worthy of being attended with complete respect, to be attentive to what is happening, and to contribute his distinguished presence.

Those invited to the banquet are one group, the guests who attend are another. In the end, at the celestial banquet, we will be together. But what is the difference?

Those who were invited had an obligation to attend because the banquet was prepared especially for them; they were important because the host waited for them to continue their relationship. But with their absence, they do not make the banquet fail; the purpose of that encounter must be accomplished.

The guests who do attend take their place; they are those who are asked to come, taken from their work and their problematic lives, *from the crossroads*, where no one is deterred from attending by having to leave his work.

It is very probable that in the plan of salvation history, the invited guests were the Jewish people whose absence Jesus laments, even today, and that the guests who attend are all of us who have responded to His call in the plan of our personal history. Many times God is inviting us; some have already responded to the invitation, but He could be inviting others; that is, He may be begging us to take a place at His table.

At this time in your personal history, are you being invited or are you a guest? Where in the crossroads of our life does the call to attend the banquet reach us? What are the greater concerns that would prevent me from participating and cause me to abandon my place at the banquet?