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## Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

[October 15, 2017](#)

Isaiah 25:6-10a

Psalm 23

Philippians 4:12-14, 19-20

Matthew 22:1-14

In ancient Peru, long before the days of the marauding Spaniards, the Inca's preferred method of conquest was to overcome people with kindness. Emissaries of the Inca would go to a place not yet in the empire with an overabundance of gifts, signs of what the people could expect if they would become part of the Inca realm. Those who refused the offer learned some hard lessons from the Inca armies. They became the unfortunate subjects of a policy of dividing and exiling rebellious people from their home territory, neutralizing their threat to the empire. Long before the days of the Mafia, the Inca made offers nobody should refuse.

That history sounds like a replay of the offers we hear in today's readings, except for the fact that Isaiah and Jesus outdid the Inca. When Isaiah gives us a picture of God's feast on the peak, he wants our mouths to water. Picture chocolate cake, lemon meringue pie, creamy pastries, fresh fish, roasted lamb and beef on the spit, berries and cherries, milk and honey. The wine selection is like no other — aged to perfection.

This isn't just any celebration of a victory or national holiday. This is God's surprise party for humanity, planned for people who have been trapped in tragedy. Natural disasters and war have left them devastated. They've also failed to live their own ideals. According to Isaiah, they arrive veiled in mourning garb. This party is the last thing they expect.



(Mark Bartholomew)

Then they encounter God. Whatever their conception of the Almighty, they hardly expected God to hurry out like a mother and wipe the tears from their faces. They came, scarred from their battles, guilty of everything human beings could imagine, and God invited them in. When no penalty could compensate for their wrong, God made no reproach. The whole earth was coming under the judgment of love. Nothing less. That's Isaiah's story.

Jesus too talks about a party. He tells of a king (guess who?) who's prepared a wedding feast for his son. When everything is all set, the clergy, nobles and artists snub the servants bearing the invitation. Not to be dismayed, the king tries again. This time the fancy folk beat and kill the servants. So, the king sends them a marauding army. He sent more servants to find people worthy of his feast. This time they succeeded, and the banquet hall brimmed with a motley crowd gathered from the streets.

The simple folk in Jesus' audience surely got a good chuckle from the story. The chief priests and elders probably found it a bit less enjoyable. But Jesus hid a riddle in the middle. After a moment of consideration, the listeners started scratching their heads asking: What counts as worthy? The feasters included bad and good alike. What was the entrance requirement?

Jesus hid a couple of cryptic hints in the afterword to the story, the scene where the king caught sight of somebody who didn't dress for the party. The king went right to him to ask why. Obviously, if everybody from the streets had been able to present themselves appropriately, he could have done so as well. When the guy refused to respond, the king treated him like the folks who refused to come at all — he cast him out into the darkness. Then, as if a proverb would explain it all, Jesus says, "Many are invited, but few are chosen."

Who are the chosen? Like the people who accepted the Inca's invitation, they are the ones willing to receive God's surprising and free offers. Their religious role or social position means so little that the higher the rank, the less likely they are to be at the banquet. Moral standing is hardly a qualification, as Jesus made quite clear with the words, "bad and good alike." (Oh, how that word "alike" can gall the ones who think they're good!) The only difference between the banqueters and those gnashing their teeth in the dark was the partygoers' wholehearted acceptance of the invitation.

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Jesus prefaced this parable saying that he was going to talk about the kingdom of heaven. As is obvious to anyone who has read Isaiah, Jesus used images from his tradition and gave them his own particular twist.

Today, we see the banquet as a symbol of Communion and our celebration of the Eucharist. This parable invites us to consider who God is inviting and with whom we are willing to share the communal bread and wine.

At each Eucharist we pray, "Lord, I am not worthy." That doesn't matter to God. All that counts is our willingness to receive what we don't deserve. It's a surprising offer nobody should refuse.

[Mary M. McGlone, a Sister of St. Joseph, is currently writing the history of the Sisters of St. Joseph in the U.S.]

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