



by Mary M. McGlone

[View Author Profile](#)

[Join the Conversation](#)

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. [Learn more](#)

October 15, 2017

[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

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, specially planned for people who have been trapped in chaos and 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.

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 judgement 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 start 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' whole-hearted acceptance of

the invitation.

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.

ISAIAH 25:6-10a

God's great festival takes place on the mountaintop, Jerusalem. The whole world is invited to enjoy the best creation has to offer. God prepares this feast for people who have had little to rejoice or celebrate in the recent past. As Isaiah paints the scene, it's as if God takes people from a funeral procession and leads them into a surprise party. They all arrive with veiled faces, the sign that they are in mourning, most likely for their own who have died in battle. The fact that all peoples are so veiled is a subtle condemnation of war; no one is the victor because, in the end, all are shrouded in sorrow. But God will destroy that veil and the web woven over all nations.

What is the web woven over all the nations? In this context, it is the web of violence and destruction, an atmosphere that, once instituted, seems impossible to escape.

The concluding phrase sums up the first two: God will destroy death forever. That phrase is one of the sources of the Orthodox and Byzantine Easter proclamation: "By death, Christ conquered death!" Death, which is understood as the loss of all living relationship, will be no more.

The banquet on this mountain includes an encounter with God. It sounds like even more than the beatific vision. The encounter Isaiah describes is one in which God, like a mother, wipes away the tears from every human face. Pope Francis describes the joy of this encounter saying, "How wonderful is the certainty that each human life is not adrift in the midst of hopeless chaos, in a world ruled by pure chance or endlessly recurring cycles!" ("*Laudato Si'*, on Care for Our Common Home" #65).

The second dimension of the great promise depicted in this scene is that God will remove all reproach. No more guilt or fear of punishment. The love of God, which overcomes death, also overcomes sin. God can heal every breach of relationship. Sinners at this banquet will look at their past not with shame but as a revelation of the depth of the love of God who reached out to them at their worst and transformed them into all they could be.

This passage sings of the universal communion to which God invites everybody. Francis tells us that the key to human fulfillment is communion with God, with others and with all creatures. This is our potential to live in the very dynamism of the Trinity (LS #240). Isaiah and Francis invite us to dream, to contemplate, to try to imagine what it is that God offers and hopes for us. The more we imagine it, the more we will be able to put it into practice. Then again, no matter how great our imagination and how broad the communion we experience, the Lord's mountain feast promises more than we could ever ask or imagine.

Think BIG!

PHILIPPIANS 4:12-14, 19-20

This, our last selection from Paul's Letter to the Philippians, makes for an odd fit between the two readings about the bountiful banquet God prepares for his faithful. This reminds us that the second reading during the season of Ordinary Time is a semi-continuous reading of Scripture, not chosen to fit the theme of the Sunday. (The first reading is always chosen as a commentary or complement to the Gospel and the psalm responds to the first reading.)

Our selection is part of Paul's expression of gratitude for what the Philippian community has done for him, but the Lectionary ignores that context and simply presents us with Paul's personal reflection on the relative unimportance of the material conditions of life.

Paul begins this reflection by speaking of his personal experience, something his friends have surely heard about in person. His phrases about humble circumstances would be literally translated as "I know how to be made low and how to abound." Whether consciously or not, this contrast reflects the earlier hymn about Christ who humbled himself and was exalted by God.

This approach could sound like the Stoic philosophy of the Greeks. Stoic philosophers tried to free themselves from emotions and the desire for pleasure or fear of pain. Paul may have disregarded pain and danger as part of his discipleship, but he lived and wrote with a passion. He was not a Stoic, but a disciple of Christ whose commitment to the Gospel overrode every other consideration.

Because Paul understood his approach to life as a grace, he wanted to share it with the Philippians. Thus, even as he expressed gratitude for their support, he wanted them to remember that abundance or want, support or abandonment were never to be the factors determining their behavior.

Ignatius of Loyola fleshed this out in what he called the First Principle and Foundation of his Spiritual Exercises. Unlike the Franciscans who felt called to seek and embrace poverty, Ignatius counseled “indifference,” an attitude of acceptance of whatever circumstances life offers on the material and emotional level. In his *Spiritual Exercises*, he taught his followers, “We should not want health more than illness, wealth more than poverty, fame more than disgrace, a long life more than a short one ... but we should desire and choose only what helps us more towards the end for which we are created.”

Paul attributed his ability to live this attitude of indifference to the strength he received from Christ. Ignatius would explain it as receiving the grace of “finding God in all things.”

Both Paul and Ignatius teach that a lack of indifference, attachment to what we think of as good or desirable — even if that be poverty or virtuousness — can detour us from our Christian vocation. In Romans, Paul taught that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ (8:38-39). As he closed his Letter to the Philippians, Paul called the community to accept whatever came as a path toward deeper union with God, trusting that God will give them all they need, even if it is not exactly what they might want.

MATTHEW 22:1-14

In this, the third parable he tells during his last week on Earth, Jesus bedazzles the crowd with the story he invites them to imagine. Who made up his audience? Some were religious leaders, but the majority probably represented the classes from whom Jesus chose his disciples. They would have thought of themselves as ordinary

folk, not particularly polished, some better off than others. They were the sort who would be mightily impressed by the vestments of the high priest, by the power of the Romans, by the adornments of the Temple.

These folks knew enough about fathers and sons and tenants and landowners to visualize the characters of other parables. Now, when Jesus invites them to think of a king, he's bringing them into the stuff of fairy tales or wild dreams. Suddenly, their imaginations are active in a different way.

What would it be like to be on the king's guest list? Who in their right mind would turn down a royal invitation? What kind of people could conceive of ignoring a second invitation — or worse yet, mistreat the representatives of their king? That's treachery! And, as the powerless know all too well, it's also stupid. Those arrogant high-and-mighty types are about to get just what they deserve! (As if they ever deserved what they had!)

Jesus gets the audience to consider the problem: What's the king to do? He's got the meat roasting and the wine decanted. He can't let the rebuff define his son's celebration. So while he sends his army to pillage the rebels' towns, he sends his servants out to round up any and everybody. In the process, he gives his verdict on the situation: "Those who were invited were not worthy to come."

What makes someone worthy? The unworthy are the ones who refused the invitation. The worthy must, therefore, be the people who were happy to receive a free meal. All that mattered was that they showed up.

But there was one hold out. Somebody came in who didn't belong. A fellow crashed the party not wanting to be a guest, not wanting to put on his best. The intruder didn't wear a wedding garment. In other words, whatever he was doing there, he didn't come to celebrate with the king and his family. He attended the event, but he had nothing to do with its purpose. He couldn't be allowed to stay; his attitude was a contaminant. Being at this celebration was an all or nothing affair. Anyone who showed up but didn't want to take part, was like vinegar in a milkshake — he curdled the atmosphere.

Of course, this parable should lead us to consider our Eucharistic celebrations. It reminds us that none of us deserve the invitation, and all are called to accept it. It calls us to look at how we welcome one another, and asks us who else we should invite to join in our banquet. Finally, it tells us that if we aren't enjoying it, we're

missing the point.

Planning: 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time

By: Lawrence Mick

Many of our assemblies may find it difficult to grasp how enticing Isaiah's vision of feasting in the kingdom would have been to people of his time. There certainly are many people today, even in our own country, who struggle to find enough to eat. But most people in North America have access to a wealth of food and drink that would have been unimaginable even for the rich in ancient times.

Isaiah's vision reminds us of the generosity of God who gives us all that we need. It might also remind us that God's gifts are meant to be shared by all of God's people. This Sunday is designated as Mission Sunday, a day to remember our connections to people all around the world. The most important gift we have to share with the world is our faith, and missionaries around the globe give their lives to offer that gift to those who do not yet know the Lord. Often, that gift cannot be received until those people experience the difference that faith makes in the lives of believers. That means our efforts to feed and clothe and educate people in desperate circumstances are the first ways that they hear the Gospel message of God's love and mercy.

The words of our second reading today, though, might call us much further than we are used to going. Pope Francis, in his encyclical "*Laudato Si'*", on Care for Our Common Home," has challenged us to rethink our basic lifestyles that consume so much more of the world's resources than we have a right to claim. Paraphrasing Mahatma Gandhi, Franciscan Fr. Richard Rohr often reminds his readers: "There is enough to go around and meet everyone's need but not everyone's greed."

Paul says, "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." We might wonder if our parishioners can echo Paul's words.

Francis calls us to embrace a simpler lifestyle so that all of the world's people can have enough to survive. What would our lives look like if we only used the portion of the world's resources that corresponded to our portion of the world's population?

So much of the resistance to facing the challenges of climate change seems to flow from a refusal to recognize that our own use and abuse of the world's resources has been a major contributor to the problem.

If we are all to survive on this planet, some serious changes are necessary, not just minor adjustments around the edges of our comfort. How much are we willing to change to help our brothers and sisters all around the world?

Prayers: 28th Sunday in OrdinaryTime

By: Joan DeMerchant

Introduction

Our readings continue to be rich in imagery about God, what God is like, what God does for us, and how God invites us. The images are ancient, but they still speak to those of us with these questions: Why are we here? What do we seek from God? What are our beliefs? What do we have in common with our ancestors? What does it mean to be called? As we listen to these readings, there are wonderful questions to challenge us as well as answers to deepen our faith.

Penitential Act

- Lord Jesus, you tell us who is invited into the kingdom of heaven: Lord, have mercy.
- Christ Jesus, you show us what is required of worthy guests: Christ, have mercy.
- Lord Jesus, you challenge us to ponder our response to the invitation: Lord, have mercy.

Prayer of the Faithful

Presider Let us pray for all who have been called and for all of God's beloved people.

Minister For the whole church: That gratitude for God's calling may make us humble servants of one another ... we pray,

- For those throughout the world living in ambiguity, confusion or doubt ... we pray,

- For those whose perception of God has been skewed by hatred, injustice or fear ... we pray,
- For the resolution of conflict or violence caused by religious misunderstanding ... we pray,
- For those who think they have the fullness of truth or refuse to understand how others see God ... we pray,
- For honesty about our own faith and our Christian commitment ... we pray,
- For all who live in poverty, unemployment, discouragement or with any kind of struggle ... we pray,
- For those most in need in this community, especially the sick, the dying and the grieving ... we pray,

Presider God who calls us, we come to you as people sometimes doubtful, tired or confused. Strengthen us as you have strengthened those who have gone before us. Help us respond more fully to your life-giving invitation. We trust in the promises you have made. We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Advertisement

This story appears in the **Cycle A Sunday Resources** feature series. [View the full series](#).