

Psalm 19:14 Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.

1 Timothy 1:2 ...Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

“God Builds through His Banquet”

Introduction: Fancy Invitations

Everyone appreciates a beautiful invitation. I get a lot of them at this time of the year: invitations to confirmations, graduations, weddings and so on. They are all important to me but some stand out more than others. Some invitations are very ornate. I like the envelopes with gold foil inside. Those look fancy before you even get to the invitation itself. When I see that shiny gold foil as I open the envelope, I can't help but think, “Wow! This invitation is going to be good.”

Of course, it is being that invited that is really important, not the card itself. The invitation tells you that this person is thinking of you and that is the important thing. Our Gospel lesson today tells us that God is thinking of us too. He is thinking of us enough that he invites us to his banquet, a banquet that begins now and goes on forever.

Two Invitations: Jews and Gentiles

God has been inviting people to his banquet for a long time. Ever since Adam and Eve fell into sin, he has been inviting humanity back to him. In the Old Testament, God told Moses how the people of Israel should prepare the Passover banquet or seder meal. Later, he taught the priests to make sacrifices so that those who sacrificed the animals could enjoy a feast around his tabernacle or temple. God inspired King David to write the 23rd Psalm to give us an

image of the heavenly banquet. God's Old Testament people were repeatedly invited to dine with him.

In our Gospel lesson, Jesus is dining with a group of pious Jews. One of them says, not incorrectly, "Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the Kingdom of God." Jesus does not say that he is wrong but he does fill him in on what he may not understand about his own statement.

Jesus does so by telling a parable about a man who holds a great banquet. The man invites his guests well in advance of the date. In that culture, people would be told in advance what day the feast would be but the exact time would not be fixed. When the meal was ready, the servants would be sent out a second time to let people know it is supper time.

This is when the invited guests make excuses. One says he bought a field and needs to examine it. Oh really? You mean he spent his money on a field he has not examined? It is clear that he is not being honest.

The second invited guest says he bought oxen and needs to examine them. These oxen would cost more than \$10,000 today. It is hard to believe he spent that kind of money on them with examining them. He is clearly giving a lame excuse.

The third invited guest must be really in love. He can't pull himself away from his new wife to go to the banquet but he doesn't have to! The banquet is open to her too but he is just making an excuse not to go.

Why don't these people want to go to the banquet in the Kingdom of God? That is a good question. Why do people want to live apart from God when God wants them to be with him? The only answer is sin. They love sin more than they love God.

This is where in the parable the man throwing the banquet, who represents God, gets ticked off. These neighbors love almost everything more than they love being with him. They would rather be with oxen than with him. So he responds by opening the banquet to anyone, even those who are not worthy to attend.

Jesus is telling this parable to the Jewish nation. They are the ones who are rejecting his ministry. They are the ones who are busy doing everything except returning to God. So in return, God will go to all the other nations.

The Jews' loss is our gain. We, as non-Jews, are the unworthy guests who are invited by God. Paul writes of this many years later:

Romans 11:25 I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.

Building on the Invitations

Even a brief look at history tells us that Jesus' words came true. Millions of people have been invited to God's banquet over the last 2,000 years. Millions have been initiated into the Christian Church from pagan nations. Some of these people have been *literally* poor, crippled, blind and lame. All of them have been *spiritually* poor, crippled, blind and lame.

But what happens when they come to the saving Church? Do they change automatically from pagans to Christians? Are the children of two Christians born with the knowledge of the faith? Of course not! They need to receive instruction and this instruction is called catechesis.

Our Old Testament lesson compares catechesis to a banquet. In English we say, “She has a hunger for knowledge.” Apparently the same idea existed among God’s Old Testament people. Gaining wisdom is depicted as eating a delicious meal or the joy you feel at a party. Insight is a delight to the wise but, like those who rejected Jesus’ invitation, it is rejected by the scoffer.

One of the greatest things that God offers us in his banquet is the ability to grow in wisdom. People outside the Church can grow in worldly wisdom. They can learn to live more wisely in this world but this worldly wisdom usually leads to despair because no matter how much you learn, it ends in death. But the wisdom that God gives his Church does not lead to despair because we know that physical death is just the beginning. This wisdom provides faith along with it and faith empowers us to believe that God will raise us from the dead just as he raised his Son.

Conclusion

Welcome to the banquet. Come and eat for free. That is Jesus’ message to you. There is no catch. There is no 36 month contract to sign. You don’t even have to have your credit score checked. Just come to the banquet.

Jesus doesn’t want your money. Jesus doesn’t need your time. He just wants you; you with your weaknesses, you with your failings, you crippled, blind, poor or lonely. He wants you and nothing more.

May that peace which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.