

The Twenty-First Sunday of Pentecost

October 9, 2005

Isaiah 25: 1-9

Psalm 23

Philippians 4:4-13

Matthew 22:1-14

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

I received an invitation some time ago. It came in a very fine envelope, obviously first class; it looked expensive – best quality. The invitation said: “It’s a party; you’re invited!” Now that is exciting. Reading on, I found the details. I was very enthusiastic until I read down to the part that said, “The menu will be fat things full of marrow and wine on the lees.” That brought to mind a vision of my doctor solemnly intoning the word “cholesterol.” Then I had the vision of finishing a glass of red wine and finding a sort of sediment. That would be the dregs or “lees.” This is not a “feast” that appeals to me. This is not a feast in our terms.

But I suppose it was so for Isaiah. I suppose if we sent him a note inviting him to join us here today and said, “We’ll be having bread and wine,” he might be a little put off.

The point is that the feast that Isaiah and you and I are invited to is not a feast in our terms. Our tastes are far too fickle. The terms are of God. God sets the table. No matter what the menu, the real sustenance and nourishment we receive is His love and His grace. The bread and wine at our feast – the presence of Our Lord Jesus Christ in His Body and His Blood – tells us of a love and a grace so great that He would sacrifice Himself for us.

Everyone is invited. The doors are open to all. But our host asks one thing of us. He asks for a “penitent and contrite” heart. That’s why we make our Confession before coming to His table.

But a “penitent and contrite” heart isn’t a matter of words said each Sunday. It’s a lifestyle. Paul, who had some impressive experience with repentance, told the Philippians to live out their faith by holding to what is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, gracious, excellent, worthy of praise. What an admirable lifestyle and how very, very difficult! They and we live in a world that would contradict those things or make them irrelevant to our daily life.

But clearly, those things are of God, and we are to learn to live here, in all conditions, without losing sight of them.

Have you met Christians who truly met that condition? Different, aren’t they? There is a sense of calm and focus that surrounds them wherever they are. It’s like a garment of faith in God’s grace that carries them through every moment of every day. If it’s not too great a stretch, I suggest that is the “wedding garment” of a Christian.

What is that about wedding garments in the Gospel? The custom was for a host to provide a sort of beautiful robe for his guests for several reasons. It was hospitable. It made the guests look a lot better. Most important, it was a very good way to tell who was supposed to be at the table and who was not.

For a Christian, then, contrition, penitence, living out our faith – all those things are the sign of who should be at the feast. God has no trouble with the guest list.

Our feast is bread and wine at God’s table; the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ; by it we are strengthened and nourished and sustained; in it we know that “The Lord is at hand.” Through it we receive the absolute assurance that for those who attend this feast there is an end to death and tears and a life eternal with Christ in the presence of God.

In His Holy Name.