

Meditations: Sunday of the Twenty-Eighth Week of Ordinary Time (Year A)

Some reflections that can assist our prayer during the twenty-eighth week of Ordinary Time. The topics are: the banquet awaiting us; inviting everyone to the feast; savoring God's gifts.

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NO EYE has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived what God has prepared for those who love him (1 Cor 2:9). There are no words to express the fullness of happiness that the Lord desires to bestow upon humanity, as the opening words of the Catechism of the Catholic Church explain: "God, infinitely perfect and blessed in himself, in a plan of sheer goodness freely created man to make him share in his own blessed life."^[1] —

Failing to find words to describe the blessedness to which God calls us, Sacred Scripture uses imagery that can help us grasp it. In the first reading of today's Mass, the prophet Isaiah speaks about the way *the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of wine on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wine on the lees well refined. And he will destroy [...] the covering that is cast over all peoples. [...] He will swallow up death forever,*

and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces (Is 25:6-8).

Abundance, face-to-face vision, peace, comfort, and the fullness of eternal life: this is the destiny awaiting us, *the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Phil 3:14)*. "Think of the Love that awaits you in heaven," St. Josemaria recommends, "foster the virtue of hope — this is not a lack of generosity;"^[2] it reminds us that *here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come (Heb 13:14)*, the home in which our Father God is waiting for us. "Christianity does not proclaim merely some salvation of the soul in a vague afterlife in which all that is precious and dear to us in this world would be eliminated, but promises eternal life, 'the life of the world to come.' Nothing that is precious and dear to us will fall into ruin; rather, it will find fullness in God."^[3]

JESUS TAKES the image of the banquet prepared by God for all peoples into his preaching but adds a nuance: the Lord wants to count on us to extend the invitation to this great banquet to all people. He wants us to share our hope with the world, to go to heaven with many other souls accompanying us. At the same time, He warns us of an obstacle we might encounter in fulfilling this mission: rejection. *The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a marriage feast for his son, and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the marriage feast; but they would not come (Mt 22:2).* Faced with their initial refusal, the Lord instructs his servants to be patient, to explain in more detail the wonders that await the invitees and the king's desire for them to partake in his celebration (cf. *Mt 22:3-4*). *But they made light of it and went off, one*

to his field, another to his business, while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them (Mt 22:5-6).

This narrative reveals Jesus's sadness when He encounters human rejection, which ranges from cold indifference to violent opposition. But He is not deterred from his desire to make humanity happy, and He asks us not to give up either: *Go therefore to the thoroughfares, and invite to the marriage feast as many as you find (Mt 22:9)*. Instead of canceling the feast or limiting it to only his close friends and relatives, He extends the invitation to all, without exception, for He *desires that all men be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4)*. "On the boat of the Church, there has to be room for everyone: all the baptized are called on board to lower the nets, becoming personally involved in the preaching of the

Gospel. [...] As Church, we are entrusted with the task of putting out into the waters of this sea and casting the nets of the Gospel, not pointing fingers, not accusing, but bringing to the men and women of our time an offer of life, the life of Jesus. We are called to bring to them the openness of the Gospel, to invite them to the party."^[4] —

SOME OF the invited guests decline their invitation to the banquet because they are preoccupied with other matters. They prefer to satisfy themselves in their own way, with what gives them relative comfort. Others attend the banquet with a clear desire to be satisfied, but they are turned away because they have not dressed appropriately: they are not prepared to enjoy what the Lord has prepared.

I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in any and all circumstances, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want (Phil 4:12). The apostle can say this because he has experience of the nourishment God gives. Thus he asserts that he can do all things in Christ who strengthens him (cf. *Phil 4:13*) and can confidently encourage the Philippians: *My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus (Phil 4:19).*

Heaven will be a feast at which we allow God to nourish us. But to enjoy it, we must learn to savor divine things, avoiding substitutes that stifle our desires. "Think how pleasing to God Our Lord is the incense burnt in his honour. Think also how little the things of this earth are worth; even as they begin they are already ending. In Heaven, instead, a great Love awaits you, with no betrayals

and no deceptions. The fullness of love, the fullness of beauty and greatness and knowledge... And it will never cloy: it will satiate, yet still you will want more."^[5] The Virgin Mary will preside over that banquet with her Son. We can ask her to teach us how to savor the food God gives us and to support us in our mission to draw many other souls to the heavenly feast.

^[1] Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1.

^[2] St. Josemaría, *The Way*, no. 139.

^[3] Pope Benedict XVI, Homily, 15-VIII-2010.

^[4] Pope Francis, Homily, 2-VIII-2023.

^[5] St. Josemaría, *The Forge*, no. 995.

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