



## Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time October 9, 2011 A

### Dealing with difficult verses in the Sunday readings

By and large, the Sunday readings are pretty straight forward and easy to understand. But occasionally, we are presented with a reading that can be very difficult to grasp. In fact, it may be downright confusing. For example, if the King in today's Gospel (Matt 22:1-14) represents our good and loving God who throws a wonderful banquet for all of us to partake in, we may wonder about the other image of our King-God who shows his fury when he sends his troops to destroy the bad guys and burn their city. Does this mean that God will be furious with us if we refuse to respond to his call? And what about the man bounced out of the party at the end of today's Gospel? Passages like these can be a bit perplexing to us.

#### Commentary on today's first reading and Gospel

In our weekend liturgies, the first reading is usually chosen to connect with the main theme of the Gospel. Sometimes the connection between the first reading and the Gospel is easy to see, as in today's readings; but other times, the link is not apparent.

The invitation to a beautiful banquet is the very obvious theme connecting today's first reading and Gospel. We notice that *all* are invited. The first reading lays out for us the image of a mouth-watering banquet that the "Lord of Hosts" prepares for "all peoples"—with choice rich and pure wines. In order for people to enjoy this heavenly banquet, the Lord will "destroy death forever."

In the Gospel, the invitation of the "Lord of Hosts" is rejected and ignored. Some even respond with violence by killing the Lord's servants. The servants represent the prophets and later Christian missionaries who are rejected by the Israelites. Most of the people seem to have no realization of what is being offered to them, or they are too self-preoccupied to pay attention to the invitation of the King.

What about the violent response of the King who "sent out his troops, destroyed the murderers and burned their city? How do we feel about this image of God? What are we to make of this? Matthew was writing his Gospel *after* 70AD, just after the time when the Romans came and burned Jerusalem and killed many of the people. Scholars tell us that Matthew interpreted this event as a punishment by God on Israel for refusing to accept Jesus as the Messiah. While we may not interpret the sacking of Jerusalem in this way, we can and should say that these Gospel verses are intended to remind us that failure to respond to Jesus and his proclamation will have dire consequences.

What are we to make of the final verses of the Gospel in which a guy is bounced out because he is not wearing the proper attire? Most scholars interpret this passage in the following way. The "wedding garment" symbolizes the baptismal dress we receive when we are baptized. If we opt for the Christian way of life, we commit ourselves to following Jesus and living according to his values. We must have a "Jesus wardrobe"—described partially by Paul in his letter to the Colossians when he writes:

*You are God's chosen race, his saints; he loves you and you should be clothed in sincere compassion, in kindness and humility, gentleness and patience.... Over all these clothes, to keep them together and complete them, put on love. And may the peace of Christ reign in your hearts. (Col. 3:12-15)*

#### Fr. Flor McCarthy writes:

In his book *New Sunday and Holy Day Liturgies* (a good gift for a priest or deacon), Fr. Flor McCarthy, SDB, writes:

*Jesus' story might seem a bit far-fetched. Who would be so crazy as to turn down an invitation to a royal wedding? But people can be very foolish. There is a streak in us that not only refuses the good, but can't even recognize it. God is continually calling us, as individuals and as a community, to a deeper and more authentic life.*

*But, alas, this precious invitation is like the seed that fell among the thorns. It gets choked. A brief look at our lives will show how this happens.*

*There is that letter I know I should write, but just now I'm not in the mood.*

*There is that sick person I know I should visit, but right now my favourite programme is on television.*

*I know I need to pray, but I just don't seem to be able to find time for it.*

*I know I should make an effort to get to Mass on time (or just to get to Mass at all), but something always gets in the way.*

*I know I should be more charitable towards X, but I just can't summon up the will to make the effort.*

*I know that dishonesty is wrong, but I tell myself that everybody does it, and what I do is minor compared to what others are up to.*

*I know I don't do my job as well as I should, but why should I break my back when others aren't pulling their weight?*

*I know I drink too much, but I'm under a lot of pressure these days.*

*I know I should spend more time with my children, but I need that overtime money.*

*One could go on. Each of us, if we got down to it, could draw up quite a long list of things which we know, in our heart of hearts, we should do, or should not do, but which we refuse to look at. And we have no shortage of excuses. They spring up to our defense like over-enthusiastic security guards.*

*The excuses that kept the invited guests from attending the wedding feast, weren't all bad. In fact, in most cases they were perfectly good ones: one man wanted to attend to his land; another to his business; and so on. But this is precisely what makes them so dangerous. We don't see them as posing a threat.*

*The greatest danger facing us is not that we might abandon God and turn to evil, but rather that we might just ignore his invitation. To ignore God's invitation altogether is the worst form of refusal. It implies indifference. Indifferent people are the hardest to convert.*

*We are invited not merely as individuals but as a community. It is the banquet of the new People of God, namely, the Christian community. The invitation challenges us to give up our isolationism, our exclusivism, our self-sufficiency. To accept means to admit our need and willingness to receive from others, to share with others, to associate with others, and to collaborate with others.*

*We don't have to earn our place at the banquet. We are invited. It seems so simple to come to an unearned banquet. However, for class-conscious people, that can be difficult.*

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Have a blessed week,

