

**Fr. Nick Dant's Homily, Saint Matthew Catholic Church, Indianapolis  
Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Oct. 10-11, 2020, Cycle A**

In the Old Testament passage this weekend the Prophet Isaiah proclaims, "On this mountain the Lord of Hosts will provide for all peoples a feast of rich food and choice wines, juicy, rich food and pure, choice wines." The Gospel of Matthew this weekend tells us of a King who threw a grand wedding feast for his son. He instructs his servants to tell those invites, "Behold, I have prepared my banquet, my calves and fattened cattle are killed, and everything is ready: come to the feast." Both Isaiah and Matthew like to portray the Kingdom of God as a great banquet of the choicest food and drinks, all prepared by God.

What is important to take note of, is who Isaiah and Matthew say are invited to this great banquet God throws. Isaiah imagines all the peoples of the earth would be in attendance. Isaiah says: On this mountain the Lord of Hosts will provide for all peoples a feast of rich foods and choice wines. God "will destroy the veil that veils all peoples, the web that is woven over all nations, he will destroy death forever." Isaiah stresses that all peoples, all nations, of the world are invited to this banquet, where death will be destroyed forever! Isaiah says further: "The Lord God will wipe away the tears from every face."

Matthew, in his story tells us when the King decided that those originally invited were not worthy to be invited he throws his banquet open to everyone. The King tells his servants: "Go out... into the main roads and invite to the feast whomever you find." And we are told, the servants "gathered all they found, bad and good alike, and filled the hall with guests!

When reading about Matthew's King who invited to his banquet everybody, both good and bad, the story reminds me of General William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army in 1878. Booth succeeded in establishing missions to serve the poor in 58 countries. So gracious was he to those whom society had written off as unsalvageable that when Booth died he was memorialized in a poem by American poet Nicholas Vachel Lindsay. Lindsay entitled his poem, "General William Booth Enters into Heaven" and wrote of the welcome into heaven Booth received from walking lepers, lurching braves from the ditches, vermin-eaten saints, and unwashed legions.

Indicating that a bass drum, banjos, tambourines and a flute should be played to accompany the singing of his poem, Lindsay told of bull-necked convicts, big-voiced lasses, and loons with trumpets; all had been warmly welcomed into heaven by God. All were present to welcome the man who had welcomed them, tended to their needs, fed them, given them shelter and, all the while, honored and respected them.

When Lindsay's poem was published in a religious journal by an Anglican clergyman, many were outraged to the extent that the perplexed and surprised minister almost lost his editorial job. As noted in the *British Weekly*, "The readers of the paper did not like to think that heaven was inhabited by saved souls and converted harlots. They thought heaven was a respectable colony of blameless and well-to-do brethren. One of these days, they will get the surprise of their lives."

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Indeed, surprised is what John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Church, told people he probably will be when he arrives at the heavenly banquet. First he would be surprised to see who was there. Second, he would be surprised by who was not there, and third, he would be surprised to find himself there. John Wesley readily acknowledged that God's ways are not only surprising, but rich in love for sinners.

Oh, and the poor man caught without a wedding garment by the King, and bound hand and foot and thrown out into the darkness? Don't feel sorry for him. The wedding garment the man wasn't wearing is the garment of compassion, love, generosity and forgiveness. He couldn't fit in because he couldn't accept all who were at the banquet. The wedding garment is the garment of walking in Jesus' footsteps of compassion and living his life of love for all. All are invited, but you must have put on Christ first! As St. Paul says: in Baptism it is we who no longer, but it is Christ who lives, because in Baptism we have lives, because in Baptism we have clothed ourselves in Christ. Having no wedding garment suggests someone (maybe you and me) who at first said "YES" to God's invitation, but laid the wedding garment of Christ aside by failing to live Christ's life of compassion, love and mercy. Only those attired with Christ will be able to celebrate the Feast.