

## *Preparing for the Banquet*

Homily for December 1 2021

Today's Collect and readings capture our present experience and future hope as followers of Jesus Christ, as those who choose the path of discipleship. The Collect asks that the Lord will prepare our hearts so that one day we may be found worthy of the banquet of eternal life, the focus of our reading from Isaiah. It then goes on to pray that may merit to receive heavenly nourishment from his hands, the focus of our reading from Matthew.

The Banquet of Eternal Life is eloquently expressed in Isaiah 25. This reading is one often proclaimed at funeral masses because it gives such a vivid poetic expression of heaven. Rich foods, well-aged wines, rich foods filled with marrow and well-aged wines strained clear. For those of us who are middle class Canadians, who eat and drink well, the hope of this imagery might be lost on us. We can enjoy meals like this now, and so don't have to wait til heaven. But for those who first read these words, such gourmet dining wasn't something they experienced and so the thought of the Isaiah Banquet was a meal most people would not enjoy until heaven. The Heavenly Banquet then goes on to describe something that we too await, as did our early ancestors in the faith, who first received Isaiah's writing. The anticipation of death swallowed up forever, of tears wiped away, disgrace and alienation that can characterize the lives of so many. Listen again to how the passage ends:

***“This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation”.***

The Church gives us this passage today, at the beginning of Advent to help us to remember that in the big picture, we are all waiting for the Banquet of Heaven. More immediately Advent is a penitential season where we are invited to abstain for the delicacies that will mark the feasting of Christmas. It is a time of prayerful reflection, confession, as we await the 12 Days of Christmas. To wait now, to eat more simply - can prepare us to more fully enter into the celebratory spirit of Christmas.

Let's now turn to the other banquet table on display in the reading from Matthew. Both of the multiplication miracles in the Gospels are an anticipation of the Eucharist. We bring to Jesus our bread, and wine, and as he did with the loaves and fish, a miracle takes place. The Eucharist is made available to all who come, and bread and wine become the Eucharistic Lord, body, blood, soul and divinity. The more deeply we can ponder the meaning of this Feast, we will see the connection with the feast that still awaits us, where all will be healed and whole on the Mountain of the Lord.

But for now, as we continue to live as expectant people we recognize the Church is the community where all of those on whom Jesus has compassion are welcomed to come and to know the healing and merciful love of Jesus our saviour.

Therefore may we enter into the rest of this Advent season with a prayerful and expectant posture remembering that whenever we eat this meal, we are looking forward to the banquet hall

of heaven, where we will all be healed of whatever ails us in this life, because there the shroud cast over the peoples, the sheet of suffering that is spread over the nations will be destroyed and death will be swallowed up forever.