

October 15, 2023
Cycle A – 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Isaiah 25:6-10

Psalms 23: 1-3a, 3b-4, 5, 6

Philippians 4:12-14, 19-20

Matthew 22:1-14

Notes from Bishop Peter

THEME: "I can do all things with Christ who gives me strength."
(Phil: 4)

1. Faith, faith, faith! It is good to turn our eyes to Jesus Christ and through his eyes see the world's problems such as: The continuing war in Ukraine, the dangerous war going on in Israel and the immigration crisis, not only in the US but throughout the world. It is encouraging to know that he is with us and especially with those who suffer and he knows suffering first hand.
2. Today's Gospel from Matthew is the parable of the guests invited to a wedding feast. As he did last week, Jesus addresses it to the chief priests and elders of the people. He says that the Kingdom of Heaven (or of God) is like a king who gave a wedding feast for his son. When all the guests refused to come, he sent his servants to bring in anyone they could find which must have included the sick, lame, blind, prostitutes and tax collectors, whom the Jewish leaders would have excluded. Then Matthew adds a second part when the king comes into the banquet hall and finds a man without a wedding garment and throws him out.
 - a. This seems strange. How can these poor folks be expected to buy a wedding garment? Here Jesus warns us that it is not enough to be invited to the feast, to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. With Jesus' help, we have to become like him progressively. That is our wedding garment.
 - b. To see this more clearly, please return in your memories to baptisms you have attended and even received if you converted later in life. Each baptized person wears a white garment symbolizing purity since baptism washes away all the sins the adult has committed. It also reminds us to do what St. Paul demands, "To put on Christ." Thus Jesus is as close to us as our own clothes. (cf. Galatians 3:27). The letter to the Colossians makes this

more explicit: “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness and patience.”

- c. Jesus warns us that being baptized or being a Christian is not enough. We must then struggle to live like Jesus, to make ours the very mind of Christ. This is no easy task but with Jesus’ help, it is possible. “I can do all things with Christ who strengthens me, wrote Saint Paul.” Without him I can do nothing.
3. Here are some examples. Just this week I received the following from a man who lives the life of a true disciple. He wrote: “I am consistently at the same place spiritually, needing to open my heart to our Lord and to be more receptive to Him. I realize any holiness I have will be because of His presence within me whether through the Eucharist, His Word or His Spirit living within me. I can't manufacture it. I can't earn it. I simply need to be open to receive His Grace. I need to try constantly to be obedient and faithful. Our Lord's Presence will touch lives. I can't possibly do it myself.”
 - a. A woman I know lost her husband when a man went through a red light and hit his car broadside. Though crushed by grief, she insisted on going to the court hearing where she was given the opportunity to speak. All thought she would ask for a stiff sentence for this careless individual but no, she told the judge she forgave him and asked for leniency. She knows what it means to “Put on Christ,” to live like Christ who from the cross said, “Father, forgive them. They don’t know what they are doing.”
 4. To live like Christ goes beyond individual morality though this is essential. We must also listen to Christ speaking to us through the church on contemporary matters and act accordingly.
 - a. A good example is Pope Francis’ encyclical (letter addressed to the world) entitled *Fratelli Tutti, or We Are All Sisters and Brothers* released on October 4th, 2020, Feast of St. Francis of Assisi. Here are just a few points from this long document:
 - He once again voices opposition to the death penalty and violence: “I ask Christians who are tempted to yield to violence in any form, to keep in mind Christ Jesus who, seeing a disciple tempted to violence,

said firmly: 'Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword' (Mt 26:52)" (no. 270).

- He raises awareness about the current perilous nature of war. The development of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons and accelerating new technologies "have granted war an uncontrollable destructive power over great numbers of innocent civilians" (no. 258). "We can no longer think of war as a solution, because its risks will probably always be greater than its supposed benefits. In view of this, it is very difficult nowadays to invoke the rational criteria elaborated in earlier centuries to speak of the possibility of a 'just war'" (no. 258). How true this is as we see in the wars in Ukraine and Israel.
 - A last example: The pope speaks often about receiving migrants, forced to leave their homes because of climate change, war and the violence of those involved in the nefarious drug trade: "Recognizing that all people are our brothers and sisters, and seeking forms of social friendship that include everyone, is not merely utopian. It demands a decisive commitment to devising effective means to this end. Any effort along these lines becomes a noble exercise of charity" (no. 180)
5. Yes, living the life of the true disciple is difficult and complex. In the Eucharist, however, Jesus continues to renew us with the faith and strength we need as we recall St. Paul's words, "I can do all things with Christ who strengthens me."

Amen.