

Lectio Divina – 28th Sunday of the Year A

Matthew's Gospel (in brief)

- Composed between 80-90 CE
- Author is anonymous, but named as 'Matthew the tax collector' by later tradition.
- Written in scholarly 'synagogue' Greek.
- Incorporates almost the entire Gospel of Mark, plus material from Q and material unique to Matthew.
- Structured around 5 major discourses (each ends with the phrase: "When Jesus had finished...."):
 1. Prologue – chapters 1- 4 Genealogy, Nativity & Infancy
 2. 1st: 5-7 Sermon on the Mount
 3. 2nd: 10 Missionary Discourse
 4. 3rd: 13 Parable Discourse
 5. 4th: 18 Community Discourse
 6. 5th: 23-25 Apocalyptic Judgement Discourses
- May be a parallel for the 5 books of the Pentateuch - Jesus the new Moses.
- Jesus first words are 'to fulfil all righteousness'.
- A handbook for Church leaders to assist them in teaching and preaching, worship, mission and polemic.
- 2 broad categories: discourse & narrative.
- The only Gospel to explicitly mention the 'Church' – Matthew is theologian of the church.
- Initially addressed to a Jewish-Christian audience – only late in the Gospel is there openness to Gentiles.
- Names Jesus as 'Messiah' at the very beginning and throughout the Gospel.

Matthew 22:1-14 - things to notice

- This Sunday's Gospel is almost a continuation of last Sunday's Gospel parable about the wicked tenants. Omitted are verses 44-46 which conclude that parable story.
- Chapter 22 begins with today's Gospel – a parable about a Wedding Banquet.
- It is (again) the chief priests and elders (religious leaders) to whom the parable is spoken.
- 'The kingdom of heaven...' – again, a kingdom parable.
- '...may be compared with...' – note that it is not the same as – don't force the parable beyond its limitations!
- A king is giving a wedding banquet for his son – notice the similarities about the servants with last week's parable:
 - Some servants are sent to call the invited guests (but they would not come)
 - Some more servants are sent to the invited guests. Notice the lavish, almost pleading invitation: I have my banquet all prepared, my oxen and fattened cattle have been slaughtered, everything is ready. Come to the wedding. But they are not interested, they have better things to do with their time and some seize the servants, maltreat them and kill them.
- The king is furious and suspends his preparation for the wedding to destroy the murderers and burn their town. These servants seem to be highly valued by the king, in fact, as valuable as the son!
- He then issues his invitation to all and sundry (the 3rd invitation in the parable) – the invitation is broadcast at the 'cross roads' of the town – 'invite everyone you can find to the wedding'.
- The servants go out again and 'collect everyone they could find, bad and good alike.' All are invited, but...
- There is a man without a wedding garment:
 - Notice he is the *only one* without the garment – everyone else has responded to the invitation by changing their clothes, he has not
 - the invitation has not changed/transformed him
 - he seems to see no difference being inside or being outside
 - The king asks him how he got in without one (notice the warm form of address: My friend)

- Notice that the man remains silent, makes no *response*
- The king throws him out
- Jesus concludes with the saying: Many are called, but few are chosen.
- Matthew here distinguishes between the initial call to salvation and the final election of those who respond with conversion and good fruit (works/deeds of loving kindness, etc) and take their place at the banquet.
- Matthew's parable is a warning to both leaders and members of his communities about presumption and self-righteousness.
- Presumably, the invited guests are the religious leaders who have refused the invitation to enter the kingdom issued by the prophets (servants). God pleads with them, but they still refuse. Indeed, they treat the invitation in contempt (we have better things to do with our time).
- God casts a wide net in inviting every one (bad and good alike) into the kingdom, but not everyone gets to stay for the feast (the man without the garment).
- Having a place at table only comes by responding to God's invitation with genuine conversion. As in other places in the Gospels, salvation is not had just by being an associate or family member of Jesus. It comes only to those who hear and do the word of God.

Liturgical Setting for this Sunday

Just as we had a story about the vineyard in both principal readings last week, so this week we have a story about a banquet in both readings. Again, the Prophet Isaiah paints a rich picture: God will prepare for all peoples a banquet of rich food and fine wines. He will also remove the mourning veil and destroy death for ever, bring healing and consolation. This is our God who saves us.

Reflection

The third of the parables addressed to the chief priests and the elders is our Gospel today. Told in the context of a wedding feast given by a great King it's a parable in three parts.

The first part is about God's gracious invitation and its indifferent and sometimes violent refusal by those invited first (the religious and lay leaders).

Second part: God's invitation having been rejected by the first to whom it was offered, is now offered to others - good and bad alike (the sinners).

Third part: the story of the guest without a wedding garment (one who accepts the invitation but does not change - a little like the son in the first parable who said, "Yes", but didn't go to the vineyard).

The wedding garment is a symbol of a converted life full of good deeds.

The sense of the last line of the Gospel: "Many are called but few are chosen", is that all are called to salvation, but it is only had by those who change and yield good deeds. There is no room for complacency.

All three Gospel parables of the last three Sundays are about conversion. Conversion is not just turning away from sin but a radical reorienting of one's life (turning) towards God. Repentance is not so much being sorry for past sins as a total change of direction. Conversion is impossible for the self-righteous because they don't believe they need it. Hardness of heart and the refusal to listen are two great biblical sins.

In the three parables, St Matthew is urging his community to seek after true righteousness which comes from conversion and repentance, which flows from allowing the vision of God to fill their eyes and hearts. The kingdom has been entrusted to them, they are to produce its fruit of good deeds through a life of continual turning towards God.

Hard hearts, blocked ears, blind eyes, refusing to change are the path to death.

We are those who choose Life.