

057 - 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time A (2026)

Come to the banquet!

About 600 years before the birth of Christ, the prophet Isaiah wanted to give a message of hope to the Jewish people in exile, and he searched for an image that would help them understand what a restored Jerusalem, a restored Mount Zion, will be like when the Israelites return to their homeland. And the image he thought of, that he knew would speak to the people, was the image of a banquet: 'On this mountain the Lord of hosts will prepare for all peoples a banquet of rich food, of fine strained wines. He will remove the mourning veil covering all people. He will wipe away the tears from every cheek. The people will rejoice in the Lord, their saviour, in whom they hoped.'

Meals had great significance in biblical times – as they also do today for many people. They were never just about food and drink, but to eat a meal with someone, to sit at table with them, was to enter into a communion with them. The modern concept of 'food to go' would have been abhorrent to people in biblical times.

The Gospels tell us that banqueting was very important in the life of Jesus. One of the criticisms of Jesus in the Gospels is that, unlike the ascetic John the Baptist who fasted regularly, "the Son of Man, comes eating and drinking." Certainly, the accusation that he was a "glutton and a drunkard" was untrue, but there is no doubt that "meal ministry" was very important to Jesus. The Gospels record many occasions when he sat down to meals with "tax collectors and sinners", with the leading Pharisees, with dear friends such as the family of Martha, Mary and Lazarus, and, of course, with his disciples. Perhaps his most important teaching to them occurred during a meal – the Last Supper when he removed his outer garment and washed their feet.

For Jesus mealtimes were precious moments of engagement with people, moments of opportunity to listen, to teach and to witness.

We can experience something similar when we go on a pilgrimage. The Masses we celebrated each day at various sacred sites are very important. But what is also important on pilgrimage are the meals and the camaraderie the pilgrims share along the way, the stories that are told and the experiences we share during the meals.

Of course such banquets are reserved not only for pilgrimages. All our lives have their joyous moments when we are called to pause and celebrate with our brothers and sisters in community, and with other friends and relatives, over a good meal, which we will do after this Mass with the Moon Festival celebration.

Today's liturgy urges us not to be so caught up in the challenges of life that we all too frequently decline such moments because we are too busy or tired or whatever.

We can also say that all earthly banquets are a prelude to the heavenly banquet to which we are all called. While all images have their limitations, the banquet image certainly conveys in some small way the joy and communion with each other and with God, the banquet host, that we will experience in heaven.

May we enjoy our banquets on earth as we await the heavenly banquet.

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