Go Forth...
A SERVICE OF U.S. CATHOLIC MISSION ASSOCIATION

MISSIONARY COMMENTARY

INVITED TO GOD'S BANQUET



SUNDAY READINGS:

Isaiah 25:6-10

Psalm 23:1-6

Philippians 4:12-14, 19-20

Matthew 22:1-14

DINING IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD

In our Gospel today we hear Jesus using the word "kingdom" in the opening verses. The Gospels reveal that Jesus used this term "kingdom" nearly one hundred times; yet, he never defined it, even though it is a central theme in his teachings and parables. It refers to God's ultimate victory over all the enemies of humanity: sickness, hatred, greed, jealousy, and even death itself!

Pope Francis in his 2015 Christmas message to the Roman curia quoted a wonderful description of the Kingdom. Francis asked his listeners to "savor the magnificent prayer, commonly attributed to Saint Oscar Arnulfo Romero, but pronounced for the first time by Cardinal John Deardon." Friends, for your meditation, *here is that prayer in full.*

Kingdom Prayer. "It helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view. The Kingdom is not only beyond our efforts; it is even beyond our vision. We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work. Nothing we do is complete, which is a way of saying that the kingdom always lies beyond us."

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"No statement says all that could be said. No prayer fully expresses our faith. No confession brings perfection. No pastoral visit brings wholeness. No program accomplishes the Church's mission. No set of goals and objectives includes everything."

"This is what we are about. We plant the seeds that one day will grow. We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces far beyond our capabilities."

"We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something, and to do it very well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest."

"We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker. We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own."

Saint Oscar Romero. Since Pope Francis mentioned Oscar Romero, I add a brief biographical note about him. Certainly, one of the Church's significant contemporary saints is Romero, the martyred Archbishop of San Salvador in Central America. He was assassinated on March 24, 1980 as he was celebrating Mass in the chapel of the Divine Providence cancer hospital.

On February 3, 2015 Pope Francis officially declared Romero a martyr of the Catholic faith; he was beatified on May 23, 2015 and canonized on October 14, 2018. Romero was known, respected, and loved as a defender of the poor during one of the most difficult periods in El Salvador (1970s-1980s), during which five priests, numerous catechists, and countless Catholic laity were assassinated. Romero authentically lived—and died—for the Kingdom. I'm sure he, to use Jesus' words, now "reclines at table in the Kingdom of God."

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NOTES ON THE SUNDAY READINGS:

First Reading: Isaiah 25:6-10
The Old Testament Book of Isaiah was written eight centuries before Christ; it was composed by this marvelously talented prophet. Today's reading provides a beautiful, consoling picture of the heavenly Mount Zion, where people will experience the messianic banquet, and there will be no more death, no more sorrow, for evermore.

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 23:1-6
Today's psalm is a description of the perfect happiness that God's care provides. Note the rich, overflowing images the psalmist employs: verdant pastures, restful waters, right paths, full table, overflowing cup, goodness and kindness. Indeed, with such abundant care does our heavenly shepherd guide and nurture us

Second Reading: Philippians 4:12-14, 19-20
Saint Paul's letter to the Philippians is undoubtedly his loveliest. Today's selection, the last of the Sunday readings from this epistle, expresses his deep appreciation for the kindness they showed him. Their generosity now serves as a source of strength—both in good times and in problematic circumstances. Paul fervently implores God's blessings upon them.

Gospel: Matthew 22:1-14
This selection from the Gospel of Matthew is similar to that of the past two Sundays. Jesus uses a parable to describe how the Old Testament People of God, the Israelites, acted. As a consequence, all peoples have now been invited into God's messianic banquet. However, one should note that the wedding garment of God's grace is needed.

Notes and Commentary by Maryknoller James H. Kroeger, who recently published three short, meditative books: ► ***Living in Joyful Hope***, ► ***Exploring Vatican II Treasures, and*** ► ***A Joyful Journey with Pope Francis*** (www.faithalivebooks.com).

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