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**From the Selected Works of Reverend Lawrence E. Frizzell, D.Phil.**

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# Call and Response to the Heavenly Banquet

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## **Call and Response to the Heavenly Banquet**

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**Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
Sunday Readings for October 12, 2014 for Cycle A:  
Is 25:6-10; Ps 23; Phil 4:12-14, 19-20; Mt 22:1-14

## **CALL AND RESPONSE TO THE HEAVENLY BANQUET**

*Lawrence E. Frizzell*

The divine plan for humanity and all creation is sublime both in God's intention and in his revelation of its benefits. Its riches are beyond our comprehension, yet the divine teaching is presented with a simplicity that makes it clear to all. "The words of God, expressed in human language, have been made like human discourse, just as of old the Word of the eternal Father, when he took to himself the weak flesh of humanity, became like other human beings" (Vatican II, *Divine Revelation* #13).

How could ordinary people long ago learn that eternal life is communion with God in a joyful experience shared with many others? All understood that life is sustained by nourishment, which should be shared, not only with one's family and friends, but with all in need. Thus, the meal as a sharing of divine gifts in a community became a symbol of eternal happiness, and by the time of Jesus the Passover feast, with its four cups of wine, pointed to the joy of God's kingdom.

Because the communion sacrifices and the Passover lambs were offered in the Temple on Mount Zion, the followers of Isaiah (25:6-10) spoke of God preparing a banquet for all peoples on this very mountain. Simple folk, for whom abundance of good food and wine would be rare treat, must have relished this symbolism. Quickly the prophet elaborated its meaning: food sustains life, so this feast signifies God's victory over death, that mystery which all people share in common and tend to dread as a grim reality overshadowing all living creatures.

Jesus knew that a meal provided an ideal context for elevating people's minds to spiritual realities, so he often led his host and other guests in discussion of the kingdom. Not only did he provide food and drink for large crowds, either to assist the hungry or to alleviate acute embarrassment, but he also taught that bread and wine would become the signs of his life-giving gift of sacrificial love.

St. Matthew records a parable wherein Jesus took the wedding feast as a model for his Father's kingdom. Again Jesus challenged the chief priests and elders of the people to respond to the call that he was mediating to them. In those days before the postal system the wedding invitation was conveyed by messengers, whom Jesus seemed to identify with the great teachers in Israel's history. How often their gracious message was scorned! Sometimes they were abused and even became martyrs for God's Word. Again (as in Mt 21:33-43) Jesus admonished the leaders of his day not to be like some of their predecessors.

If those favored with God's invitation neglect the benefits he offers, his servants will reach out to people who acknowledge that they need the divine gift. Of course, sinners among them would need to repent and strive to conform their lives to the divine will (see 21:31-32). To emphasize the necessity of conversion the parable ends with a dire warning that complements the

admonition to the leaders of the community. All who enter the banquet hall must do their part to become worthy of the honor bestowed on them. Perhaps the man without a wedding garment represents the person who sins by presuming on God's mercy. Communion with God is indeed a gracious gift which cannot be earned by mere human effort. However, once the invitation is delivered it cannot be ignored with impunity. The time of life allotted to each individual is to be used for activating the qualities of the divine image so that, in death, God will recognize his child. Rabbi Jacob told his disciples: "This world is like a vestibule before the world to come; prepare yourself in the vestibule so that you may enter the banquet hall" (Mishnah Abot 4:21). Indeed, the work of each person to prepare for eternal happiness with God will also benefit others and contribute to the Church's growing readiness for the wedding feast of the Lamb (see Rv 19:7-8).