

Twenty Eighth Sunday of the Year A [Rio de Janeiro – BENET Meeting – 15 October 2023]  
Readings: Isa 25:6-10 (Psalm ); Phil 4:12-14; Matt 22:1-14

As we hear the first reading from the Book of the prophet Isaiah, we have to ask ourselves, is this prophecy being fulfilled in our hearing? Are we not on this lofty mountain over-looking the city of Rio de Janeiro? Are we not about to be feasted on the richest of foods, the very Body and Blood of the Lord Jesus Christ? Do we not represent many people of many nations and cultures, backgrounds and all peoples? Has not the hand of the Lord rested upon us during these days, showing us the path of the Gospel's teaching and the spiritual teaching of Saint Benedict? There are moments when the Sacred Scriptures give us an insight into our lives, and even the moment in which we live. This celebration of Mass brings the Scriptures to life before our very eyes.

When we turn to the Gospel, the key message which runs through the whole passage is the Lord's invitation, his election of the people invited to participate in the feast, the banquet. We are that people who have been selected by God to be present at the feast in honor of his Son, Jesus Christ. We notice that the king in the Gospel parable, who represent God, reminds us that all people are invited to participate, both good and even the bad. All have been invited. The belief that God has chosen us, elected us, to share in the feast for his Son, Jesus Christ, tells us that we are loved by God. Each and every one of us has a place in the feast of the Son. In these days together, we have become a community who have come to know in a deep way what is the mission set before us. The mission is to live the Gospel according to the manner set out for us in the Rule of Saint Benedict. That is a significant challenge, but a worthy and noble challenge. There hardly a chapter in the Rule of Saint Benedict that does not reflect the teaching of the Gospel. Saint Benedict used the Gospel as his source for writing the Rule. And so we return home to our schools and missions with two important things in our hearts – the Gospel of love, fidelity and compassion, and the Rule of Saint Benedict, teaching us how precious and important it is to open the ears of our hearts to the movements of the Holy Spirit. We are enlivened by the mission before us. We have inspired one another to return to our commission with hope, joy, encouragement, trust, and enthusiasm.

Toward the end of this Gospel passage that is a short section that may puzzle us. Why would the king be so harsh with the man who had come without a wedding garment? Did the king not send out his servants into the streets and the main roads to gather everyone they found, "Good and bad alike" to participate in this feast? I think the answer to this question is something that is very close to the heart of each one here. The person who gives us some insight into this question is the person of Saint Paul. In his letter to the Romans, do we not read the command, "Put on the Lord Jesus Christ?" (13:14) And then also in the letter to the Galatians we read, "All of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ" (Gal 3:27). Is this not the true wedding garment that we are all called to wear, whether we go the feast of the king or whether we work in the classroom or on mission?

Clothing is a mark of identity. You can tell who is going to fly the airplane by the clothes he or she wears, and who will serve on your flight by the clothes she or he wears. You can tell

who will celebrate the Mass by what he is wearing. You can tell a policeman or policewoman by the clothing and badge that tells you they are there for your protection. So what is it for us? What is the clothing that should mark us out, distinguish us at the feast of the Lord? In his letter to the Colossians, Saint Paul again gives us an important message regarding the garment we should be wearing when we come to the Lord's feast. Listen to these words of Saint Paul: "Put on as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also do. And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection" (Col 3:12-13).

Both the Gospel and the Rule of Saint Benedict give us our "marching orders," as we prepare to depart for our schools and missions. Let us not be without a proper wedding garment, that is, clothed in the Lord Jesus Christ. If we are "in Christ," we know that we have "put on" Jesus Christ as our garment, and are more than selected for a place at the feast which God prepares for his Son. Each of us is a special guest, chosen and elected, to be the stewards of his gifts, ambassadors of Saint Benedict, offering those with whom we work the very best of gifts – the living and abiding word of God.