



October 15, 2023

28th Sunday of Ordinary Time

On the mountain the Lord of Hosts will provide for all peoples

a feast of rich food and choice wines...

Isaiah 25:6



Dear Friends;

My priest support group every fall used to go to Yosemite. There is an annual event called The Vintners' Holiday. It was a package deal you would stay two or three nights. Twice a day, different wineries would have tastings of their very best vintages. Then on the last evening the chef of the Awani Hotel would prepare a multi-course feast paired with the wines we had tasted over the last couple of days.

If you have never been to the Awani, the main dining room looks like a hall out of a Medieval castle. You would dress nicely for the event and were escorted to your table. The room glowed with candlelight reflected off six glass wine goblets at each place. One goblet for each course. The tables were set with linen cloths and napkins and enough silverware for each course.

There was an air of anticipation as people were excitedly chattering with the other guests. Often other folks would be seated with us so we would get to know each other. Inevitably the other guests would be trying to guess what this group of men did. It became fun to keep them guessing. Eventually someone would let slip that we were priests. Each course would be a new surprise delicacy and a glass of another vintage. It was always so much fun. The natural beauty of the Yosemite Valley dressed in its finest fall foliage only added to the experience. Unfortunately, the event became too expensive for our group. But I always treasure the memory of it.

Whenever I hear today's passage from Isaiah I think of the Vintners' Holiday at the Awani. Today Jesus also picks up on the theme of feasting. I think if we understand Jesus correctly, his calling is really an invitation to the "Good Life" in the sense of a life of fulfillment, joy, celebration, commitment, laughter through tears, and love. This is why Jesus uses the image of a marriage feast of the son of a king. Heaven is a hall filled with people celebrating unending love. They are dancing and singing while tasting choice morsels of life and the wine of God's mercy.

For too long the Puritans in our midst have given us a false impression of God. Someone once wrote that "*Puritans have the sneaking suspicion that someone somewhere is have a good time.*" The Gospels never present the reign of God as solemn silence, fasting, and abstinence. Just the opposite. We are invited to a life of joy.

Jesus himself admitted that others accused him of being a "*drunkard and a glutton.*" The Pharisees complain that Jesus' disciples don't fast. Jesus replies that the guests don't fast while the groom is with them. There is a time for penance, fasting, and abstinence but not all the time! The Church itself models the proper balance: six weeks of Lenten penance but Eight weeks of Easter feasting. The goal is the feast. 🍷

We might see this party at the end of time reflected in the Sacraments of Christian Initiation. Baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist symbolize our acceptance of the invitation to the banquet. We come washed, anointed, and clothed in the appropriate wedding garment (Christ), and share in the feast of divine love. Here the "*good and bad alike*" share in the feast the King has prepared. Our joy becomes the infallible sign of the presence of God. Catholic writer Hilaire Belloc wrote: "*Wherever the Catholic sun doth shine, There's always laughter and good red wine. At least I've always found it so. Benedicamus Domino!*" (Let us bless the Lord)

Peace,

Fr Ron

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