

SUNDAY

by SUNDAY

by Joan Mitchell, CSJ

Place breads from various ethnic or cultural groups at the center of your group; for example, rice cakes, challah, corn bread, tortillas. Pray together.

LEADER: You shepherd us, Creator God. We lack nothing.

ALL: You bring us to green pastures and lead us to restful waters where you restore our spirits.

LEADER: You set a table before us in the sight of our foes. Our cups overflow.

ALL: Surely your goodness and kindness will follow us all the days of our lives. Amen.

Who would turn down an invitation to a royal wedding? Who of us didn't attend the marriage of Prince William and Kate Middleton, streaming live on laptop or enchanting us vividly on flat screen TV? Who of us doesn't delight in photos of the royal baby? A royal wedding like the one in Sunday's gospel is a very big deal.

For all of us weddings evoke the deepest meaning of human life, the intimate communion between spouses, their commitment to make their love

last and make room in their lives for family and friends, old and new. Today like the grand feast for all peoples in Sunday's first reading, weddings gather families and friends from near and far.

Our next door neighbor, Joe, felt as if he were seeing his whole lifetime in one snapshot at his son's wedding. Friends from his wife Margaret's doctoral work in neonatal care flew 19 hours from Australia to attend. The gynecologist that delivered the groom and her husband came from Vermont.

Neighbors who watched their kids grow up together with Joe's came from Pittsburgh. Another sister and I came from Minneapolis; we're neighbors who gardened and gabbed with Joe and Margaret many a summer evening. Two brothers and a sister came from Joe's family, and all six siblings from Margaret's, one flying back to the States from his work site in Peru.



Joe and Margaret walked their son through the gathered crowd to await his bride, who entered on the arms of her parents. Hearing a new couple vow their love and commit to sharing their lives takes old married folks back to the day of their commitment, now with full awareness of all that can ask.

Celebrating a new life commitment brings to consciousness the network of bonds that hold us together as families and friends. A wedding and a feast celebrate the union we hope for the whole human family.

- What is the farthest you have traveled to attend a wedding?
- What is your most common reason for refusing an invitation?

GOSPEL

Come to the wedding feast.



NARRATOR: Jesus again addressed the chief priests and elders who challenged his authority.

JESUS: The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to summon the invited guests to the wedding, but they refused to come. He sent servants a second time.

KING: Tell those who have been invited, “See, I have my dinner prepared! I have killed my bullocks and corn-fed cattle; everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.”

JESUS: The invited guests ignored the king’s invitation and went their way—one to his farm and another

to his business. The rest laid hold of the king’s servants, insulted them, and killed them. At this the king grew furious and sent his army to destroy those murderers and burn their city. Then he said to his servants:

KING: The banquet is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy to come. Go out onto the main streets and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.

JESUS: The servants went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. This filled the wedding hall with banqueters.

Matthew 22.1-10

Who will attend the messianic banquet?

The wedding feast is the third of the three parables Jesus uses in Matthew’s narrative to call the chief priests and elders to judgment. Two Sundays ago, the parable of the two sons asks them whether they are sayers or doers of God’s commands. Last week, the parable of the tenants asks them whether they are murderous or fruitful tenants of God’s vineyard. The parable of the wedding feast asks if they are coming to God’s everlasting party.

Matthew enhances this third parable with details that both

express who Jesus is and interpret events in the Church’s early history. The parable of the wedding feast carries over the father/son relationship from the parable of the tenants. We Christians quickly and rightly identify the son in both parables with Jesus.

In Israel’s traditions, son is a code word for *messiah*. Israel understood its king as God’s son. In Psalm 2 God says of the king on the day of his enthronement in Sion, “You are my son; today I have begotten you.” The word *messiah* means *the anointed one* or *king*.

The meal Jesus describes in Sunday’s parable is no ordinary dinner but the messiah’s wedding feast. The royal wedding setting is unique to Matthew’s telling of this parable.

Matthew adds other details to the parable that give the story double meanings. In this way he creates an allegory in which characters and actions in the parable stand for people and events at the time he wrote in the A.D. 80s.

The king is God.

The king’s son is Jesus, the bridegroom, Israel’s messiah, who has come to his people.

The first servants are the prophets of Israel. In Sunday’s first reading, the lectionary reads from one such prophet, Isaiah’s vision of a feast God will set for all nations in Jerusalem.

The first guests are Jews who do not recognize Jesus as the messiah. In Israel’s history, political leaders sought to kill the prophets Elijah and Jeremiah and did kill John the Baptist and Jesus.

The wedding feast celebrates a union that is not between just any man and woman but between the king’s son and the people of Israel.

The king’s troops are the Roman soldiers, who put down a Jewish rebellion in A.D. 70. The 10th Legion destroyed and burned the temple in Jerusalem, ending temple worship. Matthew’s allegory interprets the temple’s destruction as punishment of those who rejected Jesus.



The second servants, the ones who find guests on the highways and byways, are the Christian missionaries who preached the good news of Jesus' resurrection to new life to people from many nations.

The second guests are those from the many nations around the Mediterranean Sea who believe in Jesus and come to the messianic banquet.

- **What does Matthew's allegory tell us about the community for which he writes?**
- **What message do you get from this gospel for today?**
- **In what ways do you imagine the kingdom of heaven is like a wedding feast?**

Christians today don't catch on readily to Matthew's allegory. For first-century Jews, both Christian Jews and rabbinic Jews, the Jewish-Roman war that destroyed the temple was a watershed event. Until then, rabbinic Jews who studied Torah in synagogues and Christian Jews who broke bread in Jesus' name in house churches came together for

temple feasts. With the temple gone, differences between the two groups sharpened. The community for whom Matthew writes lives in the midst of this conflict.

Over the centuries Christians have wrongly seen in Matthew's allegory reason to persecute Jewish people. Matthew connects the parable to events in his time. The parable will say more to us today without these details. The parable is first and foremost the story of a man who prepares a great feast and wants others to share it.

- **What do you do with abundant leftovers?**

For Matthew, the story of God's love for humankind does not end with the end of temple worship. For him, Jesus the messiah hosts the wedding banquet in the eucharists Christians gather in his name to share. He sees in the preaching of the early Christian missionaries a new wave of God's servants gathering guests from among the nations for God's banquet. God's love reaches beyond Israel's boundaries to the Gentiles.

For Christians, Jesus' meal, our eucharist, is the messianic

banquet, a feast for all nations. Jesus opens new possibilities for gathering people into union with God. He shows us that wholeness and salvation flower from loving enemies, sharing what one has, making peace, showing mercy.

- **How do you experience God's vision for the human race at Eucharist?**
- **How do you help provide for hungry people in your area?**



All people will feast.

Isaiah 24-27 forms a special unit that commentators call the "Isaiah Apocalypse." Sunday's first reading comes from these visionary chapters, which were written to the people of Israel in exile in the 500s B.C.

Isaiah describes a feast which God will prepare for the people of Israel in Jerusalem. The exiles will celebrate this feast on the mountain where the temple stood before the Babylonians destroyed it.

This meal is more than a welcome home festival for

Social action has two feet.



World Food Day is October 16. World farmers produce enough food for Earth's more than six billion people, but nearly 870 million people struggle to survive on less than a \$1.25 a day with little access to Earth's abundance.

- **Contact Bread for the World (bread.org) to involve your Christian community in the 2014 advocacy efforts on behalf of policies to end hunger.**

Israelites. The prophet describes all nations sharing this table, its food and its fellowship. Isaiah envisions that this communion in God will lift the veil of sorrow over the nations and that God will wipe away every tear.

God's Feast

On this mountain the Holy One will provide a feast for all of rich food and choice wines, juicy foods and clear wines. On this mountain God will destroy the veil that veils all peoples, the web woven over all nations. God will swallow death forever, wipe the tears from all faces, and take away the disgrace of the people from all the earth.

On that day it will be said: This is our God, to whom we looked to save us, the Holy One for whom we have waited. Let us be glad and rejoice in God's salvation. For the hand of God will rest on this holy mountain.

Isaiah 25.6-10

The imagery of plenty and feasting reaches back into the earliest religious writing we find in the land that became home to the people of Israel. In the land of Canaan, as in California and the Southwest, rain greens the hills with grass during fall and winter months but sun and heat slowly scorch them over the course of spring and summer.

The Canaanites celebrated the greening of the new year each fall. They celebrated the victory of Baal, who defeated Mot, the god whose name means death and who each year turned the earth to dry dust. Baal rode the clouds,



Her father inspired Sister Adele O'Sullivan, doctor to the homeless in Phoenix. "When I was a kid, homeless people would knock on our door and ask for food. My dad never turned anyone away. He went to our cupboards, took food off the shelves, and bagged it. I wanted to be like that. Quiet and good."

thundered and struck lightning bolts, and brought rains that made the fields fertile.

As Israel learned to worship one Creator God, they still recognized abundant food as God's blessing. Psalm 23, Sunday's responsorial psalm, pictures God as a shepherd who finds green pastures and plentiful water for the sheep and a chef who prepares a table in the sight of one's enemies.

Isaiah's ancient image of God as host of a table where all may eat calls us to the future work of setting a table for the hungry today. It envisions the ultimate communion of all humankind in God.

- **How can you participate in making this ancient vision the future for the human family?**
- **For whom have you made a place at your table?**

Faith Sharing Tip

Why so many questions?

Sunday by Sunday offer more than enough questions, aiming to interest a variety of readers. Talk about the questions that most interest your faith sharing group. You never have to use all the questions.

Joan Mitchell, CSJ, editor of Sunday by Sunday, holds a Masters in Theological Studies from Harvard Divinity School and a Ph.D. in New Testament from Luther Seminary in St. Paul, MN.

PRAY

Use the bread to offer blessings on the people they represent. For example, let the rice cakes occasion a blessing for the needs of Asian peoples you know.

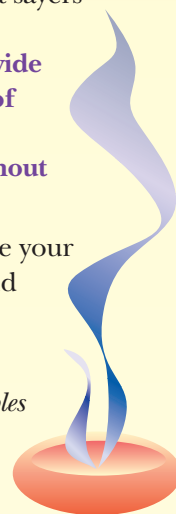
LEADER: Creator God, we seek to be doers, not sayers of your word.

ALL: We seek to provide your owner's share of the harvest; that is, justice for those without means.

LEADER: We welcome your invitation to feast and fellowship with all humankind.

Offer blessings for peoples for whom you wish to pray.

LEADER: Let us bless one another with peace.



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