

# Lesson 10

## Proper 23

### **The Holy Gospel: Matthew 22:1–14**

It was Monday or Tuesday of Holy Week. Jesus had forcefully cleansed the temple court of merchants and moneychangers and was teaching in the temple. Representatives of the religious leaders approached Him, demanding that He tell them by what authority He taught and did His miraculous signs and bold acts. Instead, Jesus confronted them with their own religious attitudes and actions through a series of parables, the last of which is today's Holy Gospel. With the parable of the two sons, He exposed the shallowness of the yes they were saying to God—no deeper than words and outward appearance. With the parable of the talents, He accused them of being unfaithful in their responsibilities as religious leaders, rejecting the Lord's call through prophets like John the Baptist and rejecting even the Son He had sent—all so they could perpetuate the religious system in which the “fruits of the vineyard” went to them. This parable of the wedding banquet then ended the confrontation and spurred the Pharisees on in their plotting to get rid of Him.

151. What was Jesus trying to make the people and the religious leaders aware of with the parable of the wedding banquet? What does it say about “the king” that he sent out repeated invitations to those originally invited to the feast? What shows the serious consequences of rejecting the king's invitation to the feast?

In God's gracious will and purpose, the “wedding feast” for His Son will indeed have its full complement of guests—and not always those we might expect to be there.

152. How is it that “both bad and good” were accepted and welcomed to the wedding hall? Since both “bad and good” will be at the feast, how must we understand the king's saying, “Those invited were not worthy”?

The part of the parable that deals with the wedding clothes is an epilogue that adds its own point. In that society it was not unusual for the wealthy to provide their guests with festive garments for such grand occasions. This relieved the guests of expenditure on their part and underscored the expansive generosity of the host. Our English “had no wedding garment” is not as expressive as the Greek, which is a passive form meaning “not having been garmented”—in other words, not wearing the garment the king supplied.

153. What is this wedding garment, and why is it essential that everyone at the banquet be clothed in it? (See Isaiah 61:10; Revelation 7:14; 19:7–8.) Why will all who appear without this festive garment be “speechless,” without excuse?

154. In the light of the parable, interpret Jesus’ closing *mashal*: “Many are called, but few are chosen.”

### **The Old Testament Lesson: Isaiah 25:6–9**

Chapter 24 ends with the promise that “on that day the LORD will punish the host of heaven, in heaven, and the kings of the earth, on the earth. . . . [F]or the LORD of hosts reigns on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem” (vv. 21, 23b). These surely were reassuring words. Assyria had conquered the Northern Kingdom, Israel, and had deported major elements of the population for settlement elsewhere. Her armies then pressed southward into Judah, overwhelming its northern villages. Jerusalem itself was threatened. Isaiah steadfastly prophesied that Jerusalem would be saved and encouraged its people and their leaders to trust in the Lord instead of political alliances.

In chapter 25, the prophet praises the Lord for this assured deliverance. Its first verses use terminology that called to mind the Lord’s strength in fighting for Israel in the destruction of Jericho and the conquest of Canaan and His mercy toward Israel in settling them in the Promised Land. Verses 6–9, the heart of the chapter, give to the praise an eschatological, universal thrust.

155. Which mountain was Isaiah referring to with “On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food”?

156. What is “the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations”? What is especially striking about the fact that Isaiah says that it is on this mountain that the Lord of hosts will “swallow up death forever”?

157. For whom will the sovereign Lord wipe away the tears from their faces and take away their reproach? (See Revelation 21:1–4.)

158. What impact is added by the prophet’s ending with “the LORD has spoken”?

The lesson ends with a short song of praise that displays the attitude of all who have been tested and have learned that the Lord's promises are sure and certain. Read the words aloud together: "Behold, this is our God; we have waited for Him, that He might save us. This is the LORD; we waited for Him; let us be glad and rejoice in His salvation."

159. How does this Old Testament Lesson tie in with today's Holy Gospel?

## **The Epistle for the Day: Philippians 4:4–13**

This familiar pericope has been read on the Fourth Sunday in Advent from ancient times and is still part of the One-Year Lectionary on that Sunday. It contributes to Philippians being called Paul's "Letter of Joy."

The joyous fellowship of the congregation in Philippi evidently was being disturbed by a squabble between two of the women (vv. 2–3). Paul urged them to settle things and "agree in the Lord" and encouraged his "true companion," evidently the congregation's elder or pastor, to intervene pastorally to help them resolve the problem.

160. Paul's encouragement to peacekeeping led him to point to an important part of the dynamic of making peace. What does it mean to rejoice in the Lord? What impact was added for his friends in Philippi by the fact that Paul wrote this encouragement to rejoice while he was in custody awaiting trial in Caesar's court?

161. How does the fact that the Lord's return is near encourage us to gentleness in our dealings with others, yielding our "rights" rather than insisting on them?

Paul wrote, "Do not be anxious about anything." The Greek for "anxious" carried the idea of a mind being drawn in different directions, not focused or assured. We all know what that is.

162. What does Paul prescribe for anxiety? What is not to be forgotten as we bring prayer and petitions to God? How will our consciously giving thanks to God influence our whole outlook on life?

163. What blessed results will be gained from practicing such a conscientious spiritual exercise? Why will the peace of God surpass all understanding as it guards our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus?

You are what you think! Long ago the writer of Proverbs said, “He is like one who is inwardly calculating” (23:7). We know today that the brain operates much like a computer in terms of its being “programmed” by what is fed into it. That’s why Paul urges us to “program our computers” with good things by focusing our thoughts on what is just and pure—life’s positive values. This is encouragement to nourish the peace of God that guards our hearts and our minds. Living in “the era of communications,” we are surrounded by the various media by which the world’s message comes to us—and often it is inconsistent with Christian values. The world promotes materialism, secularism, self-centeredness, and loose, permissive morality—things at odds with the peace of God. Is this serious? One man has said, “It is a law of psychology that when unconscious suggestions come into conflict with conscious thought, the unconscious almost always wins control of our wills when we are not looking.” Our focusing on what is good requires firm discipline and dependence on the Lord, for evil easily intrudes into our consciousness and can be very attractive. (See Romans 7:14–23.)

164. What can we consciously do to keep bombardment by the world’s amoral and immoral communication from breaking down the walls of our “peace of God”? (See Romans 7:24–8:4; Ephesians 6:10–17.)

Paul’s special relationship with the Philippian Christians is highlighted in the last paragraph of the pericope. He thanked them that they had found the \_\_\_\_ to renew their \_\_\_\_ for him. Paul then used himself as an example to teach Christian contentment.

165. What is the secret for a Christian to be content “in any and every circumstance”?