

St. Anselm's Abbey
Twenty Eighth Sunday of the Year, Year C
October 9, 2011

What is to be thought of the always uncertain future? There is, I think, a remarkable contrast between our first reading, with its responsorial psalm, and the Gospel. In the first reading Isaiah prophesies that "the Lord will provide for all peoples a feast of rich food and choice wines," and many other good things, to "the wiping away of all tears from every face."

The beautiful psalm 23 responds, "The Lord is my shepherd, there is nothing I shall want.". We can call this a personal, individual prayer: "I fear no evil," "you anoint my head with oil". Yet there is a more universal note in the words, "Surely goodness and kindness shall follow me all the days of my life." We see here an example of a kind of waltz of individual and communal concerns in the psalms. Especially this "kindness" is something much more than being nice to an individual, for it is God's steadfast love for the People with whom God has covenanted. Our celebration of the Eucharist is always a celebration of that covenant, as transformed by the Lord Jesus.

How different in tone is today's Gospel. Matthew gives us this story toward the end of Jesus' public ministry. The "kingdom of heaven" is likened to the story of a king who gives a wedding feast for his son. An odd development: those invited refused to come, even at a second invitation.

Some do violence to the messengers. The king becomes enraged, sends troops --this is the middle east, remember, --- to destroy the murderers and burn their city. In a final development, the king, while greeting the guests, "sees a man there without a wedding garment." How is this, he asks the man. Hearing no answer he has him bound and cast "into the darkness outside, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth."

What does the story teach? The commentator Fr. Daniel Harrington, SJ, says, "The parable of the wedding feast is an outline of salvation history from a Christian perspective. It helped to explain the mixed reception of the gospel."

That is, the Jewish leaders refused the invitation, and some even did violence to those who preached the gospel.¹

If it's true that the Gospel of Matthew was written toward the end of the first century, the burning of the cities by the king's enemies may well refer to the destruction of Jerusalem in the year of Our Lord 70. But what is the lesson for us? "Like a wedding feast:" A most joyful event, despite the dark elements of the story. We look forward in hope to that moment beyond time, when God's steadfast love will be most fully experienced.

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1: Daniel J. Harrington, SJ, *The Gospel of Matthew*, The Liturgical Press 1991, 308