

October 12, 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Prepared by Christine Bodewes, Maryknoll lay missionary (1997-2006)
Nairobi, Kenya

Isaiah 25: 6-10	The Lord will make for all peoples a feast of rich food and well-aged wines.
Psalms 23: 1-6	The Lord is my shepherd.
Philippians 4: 12-14, 19-20	I have learned the secret of being well-fed ... I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.
Matthew 22: 1-10	“Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.”

Today’s readings remind us that God invites each of us to partake in a rich meal, a banquet of fine foods and good wine. It is an invitation to come to Him, to unite ourselves with Him, to eat His body and drink His blood. This invitation is given to us by God every single day and it is for everyone, not just a few lucky or chosen ones.

A few years back, I traveled from Nairobi to northern Tanzania to visit some friends living in a small village located near Lake Victoria. I had lived in this village the summer before when I was first learning to speak Kiswahili in preparation for my work in the slums of Nairobi. A drought had been going on for nearly a year when I arrived at the village. Food was scarce and children were being fed only one meal a day. Since I had food from the city, we spent an entire day preparing a feast, roasted meat and rice that I wanted to share with the children and their mothers. But during the preparation, a handful of men stumbled out of a local bar and into the area where we were cooking. They sat down and chatted noisily waiting to be served. Even though the food was ready, I refused to give them anything, annoyed that this rowdy group wanted to eat food prepared for hungry children.

Several hours later, when they had given up hope of eating and moved on, I proudly served the much coveted feast. The women and children filled their plates but they did so quietly and without smiles. There was no joy in the celebration. The next day, the catechist in the village, an elderly but spirited woman, quietly pulled me aside and told me that in their culture, they believe that a shared meal is enjoyed twice because one’s generosity and hospitality will be returned to them. By refusing to share my food with those men, even though they were disruptive and rude, I had deprived my friends not only of their joy over the meal that was served but also the future meal which would have been returned to them.

The people in this small village in Tanzania taught me much more than Kiswahili. They shared with me their insight into the importance of inclusiveness that is emphasized in today’s gospel. In the parable of the wedding banquet, Jesus is comparing the kingdom of heaven to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. When the invited guests were either too busy or simply not interested in attending the banquet, the king wasted no time in finding people, both good and bad, who were willing to partake in the feast.

Matthew's gospel reminds us that God is inviting us to share a meal with Him and not just an ordinary meal but a feast, a wedding banquet with rich foods and well-aged wines. It reminds us that it is God who satisfies all of our hungers and needs, who restores our spirits drained of energy by fear and anxiety. It is God who fills us with renewed hope and energy. And God includes everyone in His invitation.

This message of inclusiveness is of growing importance to us as our global world continues to shrink. As followers of Jesus, each of us is called to play our role in building the kingdom of God. Each of us is called to invite all people to join in the feast.

In the course of this week, you may be invited to share a meal with someone or you may invite someone to join you for a meal. Who will you invite? What will you share? Will the meal nourish and uplift those around you?

Jesus has called us to live as He did. Would truly serving someone be a good way to start?

For more information:

Read more about the global impact of U.S. political and economic decisions in "Loving our neighbor in a shrinking world," a resource developed by Maryknoll missionaries who witness the global impact of U.S. political and economic decisions. Through this resource, Maryknoll missionaries encourage voters in the 2008 elections to scrutinize candidates' policy proposals through the lens of those who, both in the U.S. and overseas, lack basic necessities, endure the scourge of racism, live with gender-based discrimination or feel the immediate impact of climate change.

Email for a copy, or find the election guide here:
www.maryknollogc.org/2008elections/index.htm

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns: *Peace, Social Justice & Integrity of Creation*
P.O. Box 29132 Washington, D.C. 20017
phone: (202)832-1780 fax: (202)832-5195
ogc@maryknoll.org www.maryknollogc.org