

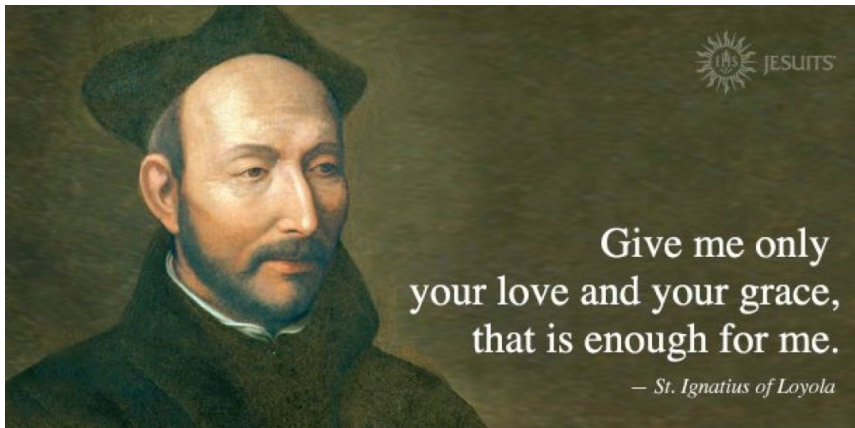
PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES
TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME
YEAR A

Second Reading Philippians 4: 12–14, 19–20

More general information about St Paul's letter to the Philippians is given in the Prego Plus for OTA 26 and 27.

Paul wrote to the Philippians from prison. His life has been a series of successes and apparent failures, but far from being disheartened, he is in good spirits. In this passage, he gives the Philippians the key to his cheerfulness. In contrast to the Stoic philosophers of that time, he is not able to be content by simply accepting his destiny and natural law; nor does he rely on his own resources. Instead, Paul's strength lies in the hands of Christ, whose empowering grace is greater than he can ask or imagine.

Paul also takes the opportunity at the end of his letter to thank the Philippians for the support and practical help he has received from them. (See also Philippians 4: 15–18.)



Gospel Matthew 22: 1–10
The parable of the wedding banquet

Jesus uses this parable about the Kingdom of Heaven in reply to those questioning his authority. Once again his audience is made up of chief priests and elders, the very people who would shortly be arresting him. This particular parable has very many parallels with Luke's story of the Great Dinner (Luke 14: 16–24) but it shows evidence of comprehensive rewriting.

A King gives a great wedding banquet for his son

Matthew's listeners were familiar with the image of a banquet representing God's relationship with Israel (see First Reading from Isaiah 25). Jesus uses this image frequently in his parables— his welcome to sinners and his feasting with them is an active sign of the call to all people to join in this heavenly banquet.

The guests would not come to the banquet

It was a Middle Eastern custom to send two invitations to give people plenty of warning, especially for those coming from a great distance. Wedding feasts would last for weeks and were a good way of showing one's power and wealth. In fact, preparations took a long time, as roads sometimes needed to be built for important guests (cf. John the Baptist: 'Prepare a way for the Lord'). In a society where honour and shame were all important, to refuse the King's invitation was a real act of rebellion.

The violence towards the servants in his parable would be tantamount to high treason, especially at a time when there was no social mobility. Indeed, 5% of the population owned 95% of the country's wealth.

The King was furious

The burning of the city is probably a reference to the destruction of Jerusalem which occurred some 10–15 years before Matthew wrote his Gospel.

'Invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet ... good and bad alike'

It is possible to see in this parable a symbol of God (the king) inviting his people (the guests). The original guests (Israel) do not accept his call, but the newcomers (Gentiles) respond to his invitation. As with any group of people, they are not all virtuous in equal measure. Matthew is preparing his audience for the shape of the new first-century Church.



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