

Do we appreciate the banquet which is Christ? This is put in rather stark terms because the metaphor which runs through today's readings can lead us in all sorts of directions – how should we be acting towards the 'poor', the stranger, those of another class or culture, or race? Is our goal here or in heaven? Is it an invitation to turn no one away at the eucharist? Whose freedom is at issue here? - in the parallel version in Luke's gospel God compels those on the margin to come in and adds detail to the excuses which seem attractively reasonable to us 'I have married a wife and therefore I cannot come?' And what to make of that chilling conclusion in Matthew's gospel, but not in Luke's, where one guest is found to be improperly dressed and cast out into the dark, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth? Is God loving or not one might say? And in our confusion we might miss the seriousness of Christ, of what God offers us in Christ, of what being Christian now means in the face of terminal decline – whether that be in terms of climate change, exhausting the world's resources, one war after another, approaching that upper limit to all human life which none of us can evade. Life and death are at issue here with the promise of death's defeat and an eternal banquet if Isaiah is to be believed? How do we put this in Christian terms today which will convince not only others but ourselves? Esther de Waal writes well on this as she prepares to let go of life in order to find it

'my own hope when it comes to death is to be able to say: my roots are deep in eternity'
(page 91 The White Stone)

'And reflecting on the spirituality Celts or the Gaels

'they carried with them in life and death the assurance that the love of God would not lead them where the love of God could not reach them.'
(page 93 ibid)

It is this sort of deep spirituality which is on offer in today's readings and on offer every day in Christ. The immediate context is the rejection of Jesus as the Christ, as the Messiah, as God's offer of ultimate freedom, by the scribes and pharisees of the day, and indeed by all who seemed already rewarded by God with spiritual or material success. Christ is a threat to this way of seeing the world, to those whose roots are not deep in eternity but in immediate reward. So it's an issue of trust. Can we risk being invited to a banquet over which we have no control and which will make demands on us over which we have no control – an openness to people and events we would rather have nothing to do with? The man who is cast out has come to the feast expecting to be fed but with no expectation that he must in turn feed others. We're in a cycle of giving here which has no end, a cycle of learning both how to receive, to respond to the invitation of a feast of unending grace, and how to give so that this cycle remains unending, uninterrupted. Or in the words of Esther de Waal once again, and these need much reflection

'We watch Christ who in the Gospels is dismissing certainties (and so) shows us what certainties meant'
(page 100 ibid).

'So all must be prepared for a very peculiar sort of journeying – not the unfolding of foreordained, necessary patterns, but the tracing of all the diverse and unexpected factors that make things go this way rather than that.'
(page 101 ibid)

This is where I would say, our daily eucharist, our daily bread, coincides with eternity -we are already in Christ being fully provided for – so we can risk everything in certain hope of being fed again. It's an eternal banquet and always has been.

This is where Christ goes beyond merely the question of human survival.

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