

Eighteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, August 2, 2026

The first reading contains an invitation from the Lord to the prophet Isaiah, and it is addressed to the exiles in Babylon. *“Come to a banquet to which food and drink are both free and fully satisfying.”* Now, the banquet is the metaphor for the New Covenant; the New Covenant the Lord wants to make with his people in place of the old one that had been broken by the people’s infidelities.

This banquet image is also in connection with today's Gospel. Now, for a moment, let's step back and put it into context. What's going on at the miracles here in the multiplication of the loaves and fishes? We need to recognize that *“Jesus, after receiving the news of the death of John the Baptist, his cousin, he retired to a lonely place.”* He went out by himself in a boat with his apostles. And then the crowd followed him on foot there. Christ’s heart could never resist suffering. He takes pity on the people who follow after them, teaching them, healing them, and then feeding the crowd. I'm asking for us to we recall the miracle of how after the intercession of Moses God provided manna for his people in the desert and now our Lord, who is the new Moses, feeds his people in the desert.

In this miracle, we see an anticipation of the Eucharistic Feast. The sacrifice and the gestures and words used are exactly the same ones that are used in describing the Institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper. *“He took the bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave to him”*. These are same words we have in every Mass. The Eucharist, in turn, can anticipate the final banquet of the Kingdom where we are to keep our garments white, the garments of Baptism clean and

pure, so we can enjoy and be partakers in the feast of the bride and groom, the Christ of his Church.

Now, Christ provides food for the crowd who saw him as teacher and healer. That God shows his love, a love so strong writes Paul *“that nothing can separate one from the love of Him.”*

And then in the second reading, Paul gives us a rundown of different courses and dimensions of creation, human existence, death and life, spirits, angels, principalities, powers, time, things present, things to come, and astronomical forces, the height and depth. None of these is an actual threat to those who remain in God's love. We also hear St. Paul say, *“nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God.”* And some will come to use those words and say that nothing separates us from the love of God, so not even by sin can separate us from the love of God. Once saved, always saved.

Importantly this is not the claim that Paul is making. He is not saying that salvation is actually absolutely assured for believers but a claim that salvation cannot be threatened by any cosmic forces outside of ourselves. For St. Paul, the only real threat to our salvation is our free will. We are free to reject God's love, and we are free to forfeit. We do this to our sins by turning away from God.

In the letter off to the Romans, Paul brings up four different ways that he identifies this. Also in his other letters, Paul writes in Romans, *“Do you not know that if you yield yourself to anyone as obedient slaves, your slaves are the ones whom you obey. Either of sin, which leads to death, or an obedience which leads to righteousness.”*

Here Paul is not writing to the pagans. He is writing to a Christian community - those who are already baptized. Those are already believers. He's not saying, don't worry about it - once saved, always saved. He continues elsewhere. Paul states: *"Where you live according to the flesh, you will die. But if by the power of the spirit, we put to death the deeds of the body, you will live."* Still Paul in his letter to the Romans addressed to those who believe that God's kindness, forbearance, and patience give sufficient guarantee that the threat of punishment of man's sin in will be averted, universal salvation of all, because God is so good, he would never condemn somebody to Hell. God doesn't send people to Hell. We choose not to go to Heaven. And he respects that choice. He gives us free will and he won't take that away from us. He will never force the cure.

Now, to this position, Paul sternly advised that *"Such hope is foolishness. On the day of God's judgment, his judge, his justice alone will rule, giving everybody their due, according to their works."* Elsewhere in his letters Paul encourages us to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. And on the day of God's judgment his goodness will certainly not declare the most saints those who chose to reject his gift of salvation. God will never force himself on us. He gives free will. He invites us. He calls out to us; he constantly reaches out to his Church. He wants us. He will never force himself. Importantly, Paul is reminding us today that despite the trials and struggles we have to go through they are benefits of those who stay united to our Lord, and they do not have the power to separate us. The very things that afflict us are what make us sharers of Jesus' triumph over sin. We can unite ourselves with him, he who overcame sin, and put to death, death itself.

And as always, Paul is quick to clarify that this takes place not by our own power, but through Christ who loves us. It's not what we do, but what he does to us, for us, and we allow us to say yes to him. Thanks to Christ's grace, no circumstance or created power outside of ourselves can sever the bond that joins us to the risen Lord.

Again, the one thing that separates us from God are the serious and deadly sins we freely choose to commit. God loves us and desires our salvation. Our sin though is a refusal of his love and of his saving gifts. Remaining in sin is a refusal of his merciful love and risks our eternal soul. Importantly, we do not need to fear God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and has great kindness. Our Lord loves us and desires our salvation. He sent his only begotten son into the world to die for us, that we may live in him, to pay the price, that we have a physician in Heaven, heals us through his Church. We have hope in our Lord who provides us with a way to remain united to Him, to renew the eternal covenant in us.

The antidote to our sin, the way we accept Jesus' merciful love, is found in the Sacrament of the Church, especially the Sacrament of Confession which the other side, the fallen angels, want us to fear in order that we will avoid going to Confession and thus choose to remain in our sins. Importantly, there is nothing to fear in Confession. This is one of Christ's healing Sacraments. It is a cure, not a punishment. It is like going to the doctor's office. If we don't tell the doctor what's going on, he or she cannot help us. In the same way Christ cannot, because again, he will not force himself on us. We have to confess what we do wrong and he will forgive, *"All will come to me, I will receive. I will not lose any who come to me."* You have that assurance in Scriptures.

When we come to Our Lord to be reunited to him through the Sacraments to the Church a practice that will stay united to God's grace, includes this prescription, will stay with the physician in pain, a prescription of monthly Confession and Confession for every grave offense, weekly Mass, with worthy reception of Holy Communion and daily prayer. If we have a grave offense, we can receive Spiritual Communion. If we don't, we can receive. The Holy Mother Church teaches that to receive Holy Communion with a grave sin on our soul we risk an offense against the body and blood of Christ. And daily prayer, which is elevating our hearts and minds to God, all the prayers, we have the Our Father, the Hail Mary, the Rosary. We have many chaplets, like a chaplet of Divine Mercy, all these formal prayers are great. But prayer first and foremost is elevating our hearts and minds to God.

Talk to him. Father, thank you for what you have given me. Help my friend, my family, help the firefighters, help those who are suffering. I'm sorry for the way that I said no to you. Please forgive me. Give me the strength to come back to your Church and be united with you. This is common to God as a son or a daughter, to a loving Father in heaven, as first and foremost.

So, as reminder, our prescription, monthly Confession and Confession for every grave offense, weekly Mass, with worthy reception of Holy Communion and daily prayer. This practice will help us respond to the Lord's invitation as spoken through Isaiah in the first reading: *"You who have no money, come, receive grain and eat; Come, without paying and without cost, drink wine and milk! Why spend your money for what is not bread; your wages for what fails to satisfy?"*

Our money and our ways here in our life. What are we spending on? That which cannot save you. He can. He does, and he's given us the rule. The Lord invites us to come out of the exile of our sin, to his banquet, where we are fed with true bread from Heaven. The body, blood, soul, and divinity of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. But the bread of life freely given is fully satisfying.

So today we ask God for the graces to continue to teach us, to seek Christ before all earthly comforts, in order that we may, through the sacramental life of the Church, we may remain united to his divine love now and for all eternity.