TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Many adult children learn to enter new spaces by first figuring out what is expected of them. We become attentive to the room and adjust ourselves accordingly, hoping to become the kind of person who will be accepted. That instinct can follow us into recovery and even into our relationship with God. We may assume that belonging still has to be earned.

Sunday's gospel offers a very different picture (Matthew 22:1–14). A king prepares a wedding feast for his son, but the first guests refuse the invitation. He then sends his servants into the streets to gather *"all they found, bad and good alike"* until the hall is filled (Matthew 22:10). The people who arrive are not welcomed because they proved themselves first. They are there because they were invited.

For adult children, that image can challenge an old belief. Many of us learned that acceptance depended on how well we adapted to the people around us. We discovered ways to become useful or easy to have around because belonging felt uncertain. Recovery begins to loosen that pattern by helping us receive belonging without performing for it.

Jesus does not leave the parable there. One guest arrives without a wedding garment, which introduces another truth. Grace welcomes us as we are, but it also invites us into change. Being accepted does not mean continuing to live by the old roles that kept us safe in a dysfunctional home.

The change can feel unsettling because familiar patterns are deeply practiced. We may know that a boundary is healthy and still feel guilty after setting it. We may speak honestly and then worry that we have damaged the relationship. Recovery gives us a place to practice new responses without treating every uncomfortable feeling as proof that we have done something wrong.

This is where simply showing up eventually becomes deeper work. We begin noticing how quickly we abandon ourselves when someone is disappointed. We learn that closeness does not require agreement and that another person's emotion does not have to become our responsibility. Cooperation with grace slowly changes the way we relate.

Saint Paul offers another helpful perspective in the second reading. He says, *"I know how to live in humble circumstances; I know also how to live with abundance"* (Philippians 4:12). Then he adds, *"I can do all things in him who strengthens me"* (Philippians 4:13). Paul has learned to remain grounded in Christ even as circumstances change.

Adult children often know how to function in crisis. Calm can actually feel unfamiliar. When life becomes more stable, we may create new worries or return to old roles because vigilance once helped us feel prepared. Paul points toward a different kind of security: the ability to remain rooted in Christ without needing the environment around us to feel predictable.

Psalm 23 quietly reinforces this invitation: *"You spread the table before me"* (Psalm 23:5). There is a place for us at God's table that does not depend on how well we perform. We are invited to receive care rather than always being the one who provides it.

God does not ask us to earn belonging before coming close. He welcomes us, then patiently teaches us how to live as people who are already loved. ACDH recovery continues as we let that truth reshape our relationships and our sense of self. We can stop arranging our lives around the fear of losing our place and begin living from the security of knowing that, in Christ, our place has already been freely given by God.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Where do you still feel pressure to earn belonging by adapting yourself to what others want or need?
- What has helped you receive belonging and care without feeling that you first have to earn it?
- How might your relationships change if you trusted more fully that your place with God does not have to be earned?

MASS READINGS

FIRST READING Isaiah 25:6–10a
RESP. PS. Psalm 23:1–3a, 3b–4, 5, 6
SECOND READING Philippians 4:12–14, 19–20
GOSPEL Matthew 22:1–14

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