

8th Sunday of the Year B*I will betroth you to myself for ever. (Ho 2:21)***First Reading***Hosea 2:16-17.21-22*

Thus says the Lord: I am going back to lure her and lead her out into the wilderness and speak to her heart. There she will respond to me as she did when she was young, as she did when she came out of the land of Egypt. I will betroth you to myself for ever, betroth you with integrity and justice, with tenderness and love; I will betroth you to myself with faithfulness, and you will come to know the Lord.

Second Reading*2 Corinthians 3:1-6*

Unlike other people, we need no letters of recommendation either to you or from you, because you are yourselves our letter, written in our hearts, that anybody can see and read, and it is plain that you are a letter from Christ, drawn up by us, and written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on stone tablets but on the tablets of your living hearts.

Before God, we are confident of this through Christ: not that we are qualified in ourselves to claim anything as our own work: all our qualifications come from God. He is the one who has given us the qualifications to be the administrators of this new covenant, which is not a covenant of written letters but of the Spirit: the written letters bring death, but the Spirit gives life.

One day when John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting, some people came and said to Jesus, "Why is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not?" Jesus replied, "Surely the bridegroom's attendants would never think of fasting while the bridegroom is still with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they could not think of fasting. But the time will come for the bridegroom to be taken away from them, and then, on that day, they will fast. No one sews a piece of unshrunken cloth on an old cloak; if he does, the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and the tear gets worse. And nobody puts new wine into old wineskins; if he does, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost and the skins too. No! New wine, fresh skins!"

Meditation

"Why do John's disciples and those of the Pharisees fast while yours do not?" This departure from custom seems incongruous for a group that claims to be religious. Jesus will answer this question for himself and for his followers.

It is not the time for fasting. It is inappropriate to fast while the bridegroom is present. This is obvious to anyone who has understood who the bridegroom is and what unbelievable newness of life he announces.

Suddenly a shadow falls upon this sparkling confident joy. "The day will come when the groom will be taken away from them; on that day they will fast." The alternation of the liturgy, like all human life, between feasting and fasting, clearly marks our awareness that the kingdom of God is "already ... and not yet."