

THE PARABLES OF JESUS

A Catholic Bible Study

· SESSION TEN ·

The Great Invitation

The Great Banquet · The Wedding Banquet · The Ten Bridesmaids · The Sheep and the Goats · The Wicked

Tenants

“Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.”

Revelation 19:9 (RSV2CE)

LEADER PREPARATION GUIDE · WITH PARTICIPANT DISCUSSION

SESSION OVERVIEW

This is the final session of the series, and its task is to close the arc that began ten weeks ago. We started with Jesus announcing that the Kingdom is at hand; we end with him describing what the Kingdom looks like at its consummation: a wedding feast, a banquet hall filled with guests, a final separation of sheep and goats, and the question of whether we will be ready when the Bridegroom arrives. These teachings are intentionally eschatological. They look forward to the end, but they do not encourage speculation about timing; they press one question relentlessly: are you ready, today, for the invitation Christ is extending?

A note on genre: the Great Banquet, the Wedding Banquet, the Ten Bridesmaids, and the Wicked Tenants are narrative parables in the strict sense. The Sheep and the Goats (Mt 25:31-46) is not, strictly speaking, a parable but Jesus' vision of the Last Judgment told in narrative form; it keeps the imagery of a parable (a shepherd separating sheep from goats) and functions as the climactic eschatological teaching, so it belongs here even though its genre is a judgment scene rather than a story.

Audience note: participants often hold, at once, a vague sense that everything will be fine in the end and a vague dread of being judged. The eschatological parables refuse both vaguenesses: they make the invitation specific and the readiness concrete. End the series with the joy of those invited to a feast and the seriousness of those who know they have been called to decide.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

The Great Banquet and the Wedding Banquet: the open invitation

Luke's Great Banquet (Lk 14:15-24) and Matthew's Wedding Banquet (Mt 22:1-14) are closely related banquet parables, whether variations of one teaching or two parables given on different occasions, that share a common shape: a host prepares a feast, invited guests refuse with excuses, and the invitation goes out to the poor and to the highways and hedges, that the house may be filled. The parables address Israel's response to Jesus, the unexpected inclusion of the Gentiles, and the universal scope of the Kingdom, and they are addressed to every reader. The excuses in Luke 14:18-20 are striking because they are not bad: a field, oxen, a marriage. The point is that the invitation to the Kingdom takes precedence over even good things; to prefer the field or the oxen or the new spouse over the master's feast is to refuse the only invitation that finally matters.

Matthew's version closes with the man without a wedding garment (Mt 22:11-13). The host invited everyone but expected those who came to be appropriately clothed. St. Augustine's reading identifies the garment as charity: the clothing that distinguishes the true wedding guest is love. To accept the invitation without putting on the garment of charity is to be present at the wedding without truly belonging there. The judgment is not arbitrary; it is the recognition of who has actually become a wedding guest.

The Ten Bridesmaids: readiness that cannot be borrowed

Matthew 25:1-13 sets the scene at a first-century Jewish wedding. The bridegroom is delayed; ten bridesmaids wait; five bring extra oil and five do not. When he arrives at midnight, the wise enter the feast and the foolish return from buying oil to find the door shut: "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour" (Mt 25:13). St. Gregory the Great's *Forty Gospel Homilies* (Homily 10, on the Ten Bridesmaids) gives one of the most influential readings: the oil represents the works of love and the cultivation of the interior life that cannot be lent or transferred at the last moment. The wise cannot share their oil because the readiness the parable describes is not a substance to be poured from one soul to another; it is a life developed over time. The foolish did not lack lamps; they lacked what the lamp needed to burn through a long delay. St. Gregory's charge: do not put off the cultivation of prayer, virtue, and mercy, for "later" may be the moment the door has already shut.

The eschatological reference is unmistakable: the Bridegroom is Christ, the wedding the eschatological feast, the delay the present age between his ascension and return, the midnight cry (Mt 25:6) the announcement of his return, the shut door the close of the time of preparation. The parable does not panic the disciple; it forms the disciple. Its whole point is the present cultivation of the kind of life that will be ready when the Bridegroom comes.

The Sheep and the Goats: judgment by mercy

Matthew 25:31-46, as noted above, is a vision of the final judgment rather than a strict parable, but it functions as the climactic eschatological teaching and carries parabolic imagery (sheep and goats separated by the shepherd). The judgment is rendered, strikingly, on how each person has treated the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the imprisoned. The criterion named is not professed belief alone; it is mercy, the works in which living faith becomes visible. The surprise of both

groups is identical, “Lord, when did we see you?”, and the answer is the same: “As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me” (Mt 25:40).

St. Thomas Aquinas treats the works of mercy in *Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 32 (on almsgiving): they are not optional good deeds added to the Christian life but the visible expression of the charity by which faith is formed and the soul is conformed to Christ. The judgment in Matthew 25 is not a surprise reversal of the rest of the Gospel; it is the eschatological consequence of what every parable in this series has taught. Catholic teaching does not read the scene as denying the necessity of faith: faith and the works of mercy are not in competition; works of mercy are how faith’s charity becomes visible.

The Wicked Tenants: the trajectory of refusal

Luke 20:9-19 (paralleled in Mk 12:1-12 and Mt 21:33-46) is told in the Temple courts in the last week of Jesus’ life. An owner sends servants to collect his fruit; the tenants beat or kill each one; finally he sends his beloved son, whom they kill to seize the inheritance. The religious leaders understand perfectly: “They perceived that he had told this parable against them” (Lk 20:19). It is a compressed history of salvation: the vineyard is Israel (cf. Is 5), the owner is God, the servants are the prophets, the beloved son is Jesus himself, and its placement is part of the message, for the tenants of Jesus’ day will, within days, do exactly what the parable predicts. Note carefully: the parable indicts the unfaithful tenants, the leaders who reject the Son, not Israel as a people. The vineyard itself remains God’s beloved planting; what changes is its stewardship (cf. Mt 21:43). The Church, gathered from Israel’s faithful remnant and the Gentiles, inherits the vineyard’s care in continuity with God’s covenant plan, for “the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable” (Rom 11:29; cf. CCC 839).

Jesus closes with Psalm 118:22-23: “The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner.” The rejection of the Son does not defeat the owner’s plan; it becomes the means by which God establishes his Kingdom. The cross is what the wicked tenants intend as the seizure of the inheritance and what God uses as the cornerstone of the new building. The parable is not finally tragic; it is the deepest revelation of how God’s Kingdom comes through what looks like its defeat.

OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS AND FULFILLMENT

These are the deep roots of Session 10. The group opens Isaiah 25 together in the Banquet discussion; the rest are developed here.

ISAIAH 25:6-8 (RSV2CE)

“On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of wine on the lees ... He will swallow up death for ever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces.”

Isaiah 25 is the foundational image of the eschatological banquet: God himself prepares a feast for all peoples on the holy mountain, and at it he abolishes death and wipes away every tear. The wedding-banquet parables of Luke 14 and Matthew 22 are drawing on this image. Jesus is not inventing the banquet; he is identifying when and how it will arrive.

PSALM 118:22-23 (RSV2CE)

“The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner. This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvelous in our eyes.”

Psalm 118, cited explicitly by Jesus at the close of the Wicked Tenants, names the pattern: the stone the builders reject is the cornerstone God uses. The crucified Christ is what humanity rejected and what God placed at the foundation of his Kingdom.

DANIEL 7:13-14 (RSV2CE, SELECTED)

“Behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man ... And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom ... his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away.”

Daniel 7 is the background for the Son of Man’s return in glory in Matthew 25:31. The judgment in the Sheep and the Goats is the fulfillment of Daniel’s vision; in calling himself the Son of Man, Jesus identifies himself as the figure of Daniel 7.

ISAIAH 5:1-2, 7 (RSV2CE, SELECTED)

“Let me sing for my beloved a love song concerning his vineyard ... For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel.”

Isaiah’s Song of the Vineyard is the direct background of the Wicked Tenants. When Jesus opens the parable with a man planting a vineyard and renting it to tenants, his hearers recognize the prophetic register at once; he is making a specific accusation rooted in the tradition Israel itself confessed.

ZEPHANIAH 3:17 (RSV2CE)

“The Lord, your God, is in your midst ... he will rejoice over you with gladness ... he will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival.”

Zephaniah 3 is one of the most striking images of the eschatological feast from God’s side: God himself rejoices, sings over his people, and renews them in love. The wedding-feast parables are not chiefly grim; they are the disciple’s entrance into the joy God has been preparing.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

Method: *Direct quotations appear in quotation marks with citation; faithfully represented teaching without a single quotable line is given as paraphrase with citation.*

St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430)

St. Augustine’s preaching on the wedding garment (Mt 22:11-13) supplies one of the most enduring readings: the wedding garment is charity, and the man who entered without it represents those who accept the invitation to the feast but never put on the love that should clothe a wedding guest. It is possible to be at the Eucharistic feast, the present anticipation of the wedding banquet, without truly

belonging there. The garment of charity is what distinguishes the true guest from the imposter, and it cannot be borrowed at the last moment.

St. John Chrysostom (347–407)

St. John Chrysostom's preaching on the Sheep and the Goats (Homilies on Matthew, Hom. 79, on Mt 25:31-46) takes up the scandalously concrete criterion of judgment: what was done for the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the imprisoned. The Christ you confess in the Eucharist is the same Christ you ignore in the poor (cf. Homilies on Matthew, Hom. 50, 3-4, where Chrysostom insists that the Christ honored on the altar must not be neglected in the poor). He does not allow the parable to be spiritualized: the works of mercy are not optional; they are how the disciple's love of Christ becomes visible.

St. Gregory the Great (540–604)

St. Gregory's *Forty Gospel Homilies* (Homily 10, on the Ten Bridesmaids) is the most important patristic treatment of that parable: the oil represents the works of love and the cultivation of the interior life that cannot be borrowed at the last moment. The wise could not share their oil not because they were stingy but because the readiness is not transferable; it is a life developed over time. His charge to his Roman congregation: cultivate the oil now, while the Bridegroom delays, for the midnight cry comes after the time of preparation has ended.

St. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274)

St. Thomas treats the works of mercy in *Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 32: they are not external additions to the Christian life but the visible expression of the charity by which faith is informed and made living. To live a faith without works of mercy is to live a faith that has not yet become charity, and the judgment in Matthew 25 is the eschatological recognition of who has actually become Christ's disciple. St. Thomas's treatment of the Old and New Law (*Summa Theologiae* I-II, qq. 106-107) provides the broader theology of salvation history within which this guide reads the Wicked Tenants: the vineyard remains God's, and the one divine plan reaches its fulfillment through the cross of the rejected Son. (This application to the parable is the guide's synthesis drawing on Aquinas, not Aquinas's own exposition of the text.)

CATECHISM CONNECTION

CCC 1038

"The resurrection of all the dead ... will precede the Last Judgment. ... Then Christ will come 'in his glory, and all the angels with him ... Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.'"

CCC 1166

"By a tradition handed down from the apostles which took its origin from the very day of Christ's Resurrection, the Church celebrates the Paschal mystery every seventh day, which day is appropriately called the Lord's Day or Sunday."

"The Lord's Supper, because of its connection with the supper which the Lord took with his disciples on the eve of his Passion and because it anticipates the wedding feast of the Lamb in the heavenly Jerusalem."

“At the end of time, the Kingdom of God will come in its fullness. After the universal judgment, the righteous will reign for ever with Christ ... The universe itself will be renewed.”

SESSION GOALS AND TIME ESTIMATE

Goals for the leader

1. Close the series with sober joy. The eschatological parables are invitations as much as warnings. **2.** Use the Ten Bridesmaids to make the cultivation of the interior life concrete and present-tense, not deferred. **3.** Press the Sheep and the Goats into specific commitments to works of mercy as the visible expression of discipleship.

4. Send the group out with the joy of those invited to a wedding and the seriousness of those called to decide.

Time estimate (90 minutes)



Opening prayer and check-in: 10 min



The Great and Wedding Banquets (read, Isaiah discovery, discussion): 22 min



The Ten Bridesmaids (read, discussion): 18 min



The Sheep and the Goats (read, discussion): 20 min



The Wicked Tenants (briefer treatment, discussion): 10 min



Series-closing application and prayer: 10 min

PARTICIPANT DISCUSSION GUIDE

Opening Prayer

“Lord Jesus, you have invited us to your wedding feast. For ten weeks you have been teaching us, through your parables, what your Kingdom is and what it asks of us. Tonight as we hear your eschatological parables, prepare us. Make us guests with the wedding garment of charity. Make us

bridesmaids with oil in our lamps. Make us sheep recognized by your mercy. Make us, when you come, ready to enter your joy. We ask this in your name. Amen.”

Check-In (5–10 min)

Briefly: anything to share from last week’s practices, especially the slowed-down attention at Communion or the reconnection to a means of abiding?

READ ALOUD

We have come to the final session. Ten weeks ago we began with Jesus announcing that the Kingdom of God is at hand; tonight he tells us where it ends. The image he uses again and again is a wedding feast: the Father has prepared a banquet, and his Son has come to invite the world to it. These last parables look forward to the day the doors of the wedding hall open and the guests sit down to the feast Isaiah promised on the holy mountain. They are not chiefly threatening; they are chiefly an invitation. But they are serious, because the invitation is real, and so is the option of missing it.

PART ONE · THE GREAT BANQUET AND THE WEDDING BANQUET (LUKE 14:15-24; MATTHEW 22:1-14)

Have someone read Luke 14:15-24 aloud, then Matthew 22:1-14.

LUKE 14:18-21 (RSV2CE, SELECTED)

“But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said ... ‘I have bought a field ... have me excused.’ And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen ... have me excused.’ And another, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’ ... Then the householder in anger said ... ‘bring in the poor and maimed and blind and lame.’”

MATTHEW 22:11-13 (RSV2CE)

“But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment; and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. Then the king said ... ‘Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into the outer darkness.’”

Q1. [TEXT] Look at the excuses in Luke 14. None is for an evil thing: a field, working oxen, a marriage. Why does Jesus deliberately use legitimate goods as the excuses that exclude the invited from the feast?

Leader note: *He makes the most uncomfortable point possible. The Kingdom’s invitation is refused not chiefly by people preferring evil over good, but by people preferring lesser goods over the highest good. A field is good; a marriage is good; to prefer them over the master’s feast is to lose what they were ultimately for. The parable is addressed to the religiously respectable, not to the obviously dissolute.*

Now have someone read Isaiah 25:6-8 aloud.

ISAIAH 25:6-8 (RSV2CE)

“On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of fat things ... He will swallow up death for ever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces.”

Q2. [TRADITION] Jesus’ hearers knew Isaiah 25. Read it beside the banquet parables. What feast is Jesus actually announcing, and how does that change whether these parables feel chiefly like a threat or chiefly like an invitation?

Leader note: Let the group connect the texts. Jesus is not inventing the banquet; he is announcing the arrival of the feast Isaiah promised, the feast at which God abolishes death and wipes away every tear. That reframes the parables: the dominant note is joy, not court. The warnings are serious because the joy is real and missing it is a real possibility, but the end of the story God is telling is a wedding.

Q3. [TRADITION] St. Augustine reads the wedding garment in Matthew 22 as charity: the man entered without putting on love. How does this reading change what the parable is warning against?

Leader note: It warns against accepting the invitation (entering the Church, receiving the sacraments, being a Catholic) without putting on the love the feast presupposes. It is possible to be at the wedding without truly belonging there. The garment of charity cannot be borrowed at the door; it is the love cultivated over a life.

Q4. [LIFE] Be honest: what good thing in your life has, at times, kept you from the feast Christ is preparing? Not a sin necessarily, but a good thing occupying the place that should have been his.

Leader note: The diagnostic question. For many young adults the competing goods are a relationship that has become primary, a career trajectory that organizes every choice, a friend group that occupies all available time, a consuming project or hobby. None is wrong; the question is whether it has begun to sit in the chair reserved for Christ.

PART TWO · THE TEN BRIDESMAIDS (MATTHEW 25:1-13)

Have someone read Matthew 25:1-13 aloud.

MATTHEW 25:6-10 (RSV2CE, SELECTED)

“But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ ... And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ But the wise replied, ‘Perhaps there will not be enough ... go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.’ And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast; and the door was shut.”

READ ALOUD

St. Gregory the Great preached on this parable in the sixth century (Forty Gospel Homilies, Homily 10), and his reading has shaped the tradition since. The oil represents the works of love and the cultivation of the interior life that cannot be lent or borrowed at the last moment. The wise bridesmaids did not refuse to share out of selfishness; they could not share, because the kind of readiness the parable describes is not a substance you can pour from one soul into another. It is a life developed over time. The foolish did not lack lamps; they lacked what the lamp needed to burn through a long delay.

Q5. [TEXT] Why is it important that the wise bridesmaids could not share their oil? What is the parable teaching about the kind of readiness God expects?

Leader note: Readiness is personal and cultivated over time; it cannot be transferred at the last moment. You cannot rely on a spouse's prayer life, a parent's faith, or a friend's holiness to substitute for your own. The Christian life is, in this sense, irreducibly personal. The community supports and forms us, but at the threshold of the feast, the oil that burns is our own.

Q6. [TRADITION] The parable is set during a long delay; the Bridegroom does not come when expected, and we live in that delay between Christ's ascension and his return. How does the parable shape what we are to be doing during the delay?

Leader note: We are to be cultivating the oil. The delay is not empty waiting but the working time in which the soul is shaped to be ready. Persistent prayer (Session 8), abiding in the vine through the sacraments (Session 9), works of mercy (Session 6 and tonight), love of neighbor: these produce oil. The disciple doing them is not anxious about the timing of the return; she is simply ready whenever he comes.

Q7. [LIFE] If the Bridegroom arrived tonight, what would the state of your oil look like, honestly? What practice would you start tomorrow if you took this parable's warning seriously?

Leader note: A quiet, convicting question. Many will recognize that they have been postponing the interior life: prayer, the sacraments, almsgiving, time with Scripture. The point is not panic but conversion of the present. The Bridegroom does not come tonight in the ordinary case, but the practices that produce oil have to begin sometime, and there is no better time than now.

PART THREE · THE SHEEP AND THE GOATS (MATTHEW 25:31-46)

Have someone read Matthew 25:31-46 aloud.

MATTHEW 25:35-36, 40 (RSV2CE, SELECTED)

"For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me. ... As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me."

READ ALOUD

This is not, strictly speaking, a parable; it is Jesus' vision of the Last Judgment told in narrative form. The criterion of judgment is striking: not mere profession or religious activity, but mercy, the concrete fruit of faith working through love, shown specifically to the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the imprisoned. Catholic teaching does not read this as denying the necessity of faith: faith and works of mercy are not in competition. Works of mercy are how faith's charity becomes visible. The Christian life that does not produce mercy is, in the strict sense, a Christian life that has not yet become charity.

Q8. [TEXT] Both groups are surprised. The sheep do not realize they were serving Christ; the goats do not realize they were ignoring him. What does that surprise tell us about the nature of true discipleship?

Leader note: Genuine discipleship is so habituated that it does not require conscious religious motivation. The sheep served the hungry because the hungry were there and they had become the kind of people who serve; the goats ignored the hungry because it was inconvenient and they had become the kind of people who ignore. The Christian life is finally about

who we are becoming, not chiefly what we are explicitly thinking. The judgment is the recognition of who we have actually become.

Q9. [TRADITION] St. Thomas Aquinas teaches that works of mercy are not external additions to the Christian life but how charity becomes visible, so the Sheep and the Goats is the eschatological recognition of who has actually become Christ's disciple. How does this complete the arc of all ten sessions?

Leader note: Every parable has pressed the same point in different forms: the seed must produce fruit, the treasure must be sold for, the mercy received must be extended, the wounded man must be helped, the buried talent invested, the Lazarus at our gate seen, the branches must abide, the wedding garment put on. Tonight's scene is the eschatological gathering of all of these: the Christian life is the life that, in the concrete, has become the life of Christ in the disciple.

Q10. [LIFE] After ten weeks of these parables, name one specific work of mercy you will commit to as a regular practice. Not a vague intention, but a specific practice with a time and a frequency.

Leader note: Press for specificity. The point of the closing session is to convert the themes into one concrete continuing practice. Examples: a weekly hour at a parish food pantry, a monthly visit to a homebound parishioner, sponsoring a child through Catholic Relief Services, driving a non-driving neighbor to Mass each Sunday, a weekly letter to a prisoner, a regular meal taken to a sick or grieving family. One thing, begun this month.

PART FOUR · THE WICKED TENANTS (LUKE 20:9-19)

Have someone read Luke 20:9-19 aloud. This parable was told by Jesus in the final week of his life, in the Temple courts.

LUKE 20:13-15, 17 (RSV2CE, SELECTED)

"Then the owner of the vineyard said, '... I will send my beloved son; it may be they will respect him.' But when the tenants saw him, they said '... This is the heir; let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours.' And they cast him out of the vineyard, and killed him. ... 'The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner.'"

READ ALOUD

Jesus tells this parable a few days before his crucifixion, in the Temple, in dialogue with the religious leadership who will deliver him to death. It is a compressed history of salvation: the vineyard is Israel, the owner is God, the servants are the prophets sent and rejected over centuries, and the beloved son is Jesus himself, at this very moment walking into the climax of the parable. Yet it does not end in tragedy. Jesus closes it with Psalm 118: the stone the builders rejected becomes the cornerstone. The cross looks like the final defeat of the owner's plan; it is in fact the means by which his Kingdom is established.

Q11. [TRADITION] The Wicked Tenants ends with the cornerstone, not the killing. What does this tell us about how God writes the story of his Kingdom, even through what looks like its defeat?

Leader note: God's Kingdom comes through what looks, from the inside, like its rejection and failure, the cross being the supreme example. Every Christian generation experiences smaller versions: the apparent defeat of the Church, the failure of evangelism, the death of a movement. The parable insists that even what is rejected can become the cornerstone,

because the One whose Kingdom this is has chosen the cross as the way it advances. This is hope for the disciple in any age that feels like the time of the wicked tenants.

SERIES-CLOSING APPLICATION AND PRAYER

CLOSING CHALLENGE

We have come to the end of the series. Two practices to send you out with. First, the work of mercy you committed to in question ten: begin it this week. Do not let the series end as ten weeks of meeting and then nothing. Second, take all ten sessions together and identify the one parable that, over these ten weeks, the Lord has been pressing into you most insistently, the Sower, the Treasure, the Father Who Runs, the Good Samaritan, the Lazarus at your gate, the Vine, the Bridesmaids. Whichever keeps returning to you, take it as the parable Christ is asking you to live this season of your life. Pray it. Carry it. Become it.

Scripture Memory

MATTHEW 25:40 (RSV2CE)

“Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.”

Closing Prayer

“Lord Jesus, ten weeks ago you announced that your Kingdom is at hand. Tonight you have shown us the wedding feast at its end. Make us guests with the garment of charity. Make us bridesmaids with oil in our lamps. Make us sheep recognized by your mercy in the least of your brothers and sisters. Make us, in the days that come, doers of your word and not hearers only. We thank you for these ten weeks under your teaching. Send us out, by your Spirit, to live what we have heard. We ask this in your name, Lord of the Kingdom, Bridegroom of our souls, Shepherd of our hearts, true Vine in whom we abide. Amen.”

GOING DEEPER (OPTIONAL)

Use any of these as your group has time and interest.

QGD1. [TEXT] Read Isaiah 25:6-9 alongside Matthew 22 and Luke 14. Why does Jesus consistently choose a wedding feast as the dominant image of the Kingdom’s consummation?

Leader note: *Because a wedding feast is the most concentrated image of human joy: feast, family, the union of bridegroom and bride, the gathering of the whole community. Jesus insists that the eschatological reality is not chiefly an austere reckoning but a wedding. The end of the story is joy; the warnings exist because the joy is real and missing it is also real, but the dominant image is wedding, not court.*

QGD2. [TRADITION] CCC 1166 roots Sunday in the apostolic celebration of the Paschal mystery, and CCC 1329 teaches that the Eucharist anticipates the wedding feast of the Lamb in the heavenly Jerusalem. How does this change the way you approach Sunday Mass?

Leader note: *It changes Mass from a weekly obligation to a weekly anticipation. Each Sunday the Church sits down at a foretaste of the wedding feast; the same Christ who will be the Bridegroom at the consummation is the one we receive now. Every Sunday is the wedding garment being tried on, the oil being trimmed in the lamp. To skip Sunday Mass is to skip the rehearsal of the very feast we are being prepared to attend.*

QGD3. [LIFE] After ten weeks of parables, what has changed in you? Not in the abstract. Specifically. What practice, relationship, commitment, or habit of prayer is different now from when the series began?

Leader note: *A closing personal reflection to consolidate what God has been doing. Many will be able to name something; some will not yet, and both are honest. The series is not a self-improvement program but an exposure to Jesus' voice over ten weeks; what he produces in any soul is on his timing.*

QGD4. [TRADITION] CCC 1042 teaches that at the end of time the universe itself will be renewed, and Romans 8:19-23 says creation groans for this renewal. How does this hope change the way you think about your work, your body, and the material world?

Leader note: *It dignifies all of them. Catholic eschatology is not an escape from the material world but its renewal: the body will be raised, the earth made new. The works of mercy done in this body and on this earth are not mere preparation for a disembodied heaven; they are participation in the renewal that will be revealed at the end. This is hope for every disciple working in the material world, in business, science, art, family life, and care for the poor.*

SCRIPTURE INDEX FOR THIS SESSION

Primary parables: Luke 14:15-24 | Matthew 22:1-14 | Matthew 25:1-13 | Matthew 25:31-46 | Luke 20:9-19

Old Testament background: Isaiah 25:6-9 | Psalm 118:22-23 | Daniel 7:13-14 | Isaiah 5:1-7 | Zephaniah 3:17

New Testament support: Revelation 19:6-9 | Revelation 21:1-5 | Romans 8:18-25 | 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 | 2 Peter 3:8-13

Catechism: CCC 1038, 1040, 1042, 1166, 1329

Sources cited: St. Augustine (on the wedding garment, Mt 22) | St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, Hom. 79 and Hom. 50, 3-4 | St. Gregory the Great, *Forty Gospel Homilies*, Homily 10 | St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 32 and I-II, qq. 106-107.