

Trinity 7 (2026)

Two great feasts are set before us this morning, one in today's Old Testament reading, the other in the New.

The first is the **feast of man** characterized by human hubris. It is seen in the king's feast.

The second is the **feast of God** characterized by divine provision. It is seen in Jesus' feast.

Let's begin with the first – the feast of man.

The scene of a hand appearing and writing mysterious words on the wall has a cinematic quality. I'm not sure a script writer today could come up with anything more dramatic.

This handwriting on the wall took place 68 years after King Nebuchadnezzar had captured Jerusalem. The co-regent at the time was a man named Belshazzar. He was likely the grandson

of King Nebuchadnezzar. It was Belshazzar who threw the banquet that I am calling the “feast of man”.

It is interesting to note that even as Belshazzar dined lavishly with his princes and concubines, the enemy was at the gate . . . the enemy being the armies of the Medes and the Persians.

The king and his reveling guests did not seem to be perturbed, though, as they drank wine from the golden vessels brought from the Temple in Jerusalem. After all, Babylon was surrounded by a series of massive walls. It was impregnable.

This wall was reported to have been 17 miles long, 22 feet thick and 90 feet high. Besides that, gates into the city were made of bronze, and there were moats around it. Again, it was **impregnable**. Note that word.

It is of the same category as “unsinkable” when used in reference to the Titanic and “absolutely fireproof” when applied to the Winecoff Hotel in Atlanta.

If you are not familiar with the latter, the building located at the intersection of Peachtree and Ellis, caught fire in the early hours on Dec. 7, 1946. One hundred and nineteen people perished, making it the deadliest hotel fire on record up to that time.

So much for man’s impregnable walls, unsinkable ships and absolutely fireproof buildings.

An old saying which goes back to the 15th century . . . one I’m sure you’ve heard . . . is **"Man proposes, God disposes."**

These words sum up what we see in all three of these boasts. Man’s pride and self-confidence continually get upstaged.

Belshazzar's hubris in today's reading highlights the danger of pride. By pride I do not mean having healthy self-respect and taking joy in one's accomplishments and work.

No, even God seemed to have done something on this order after ending His work of creation. In Genesis 1:31, we are told: **“And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.”**

Using our imagination, I don't think it would be wrong in seeing the Almighty stepping back, smiling and saying, “I like it.”

That is appropriate pride. The pride that gets humans in trouble and that is continually condemned in the Bible is that pride characterized by overconfidence and arrogance . . . one that scrubs God out of the equation . . . one centered squarely on ‘me’!

This was the pride of Belshazzar and his company of revelers on the night of Babylon's destruction. And false pride is still very much with us today.

This past Friday I watched a video of a conversation between Roman Catholic Bishop Robert Baron and Vice-President Vance.

During this visit (I believe at the Vice-President's residence), Vance told about his own experience of pride. Raised in a Christian home, he said by the time he arrived at Yale Law School he had become a militant atheist.

He and many of his classmates saw religion as anti-intellectual. Theirs was the pride of recognition . . . getting ahead and making a name for themselves . . . being noticed by the intellectual elite.

As he went on, he told how his false pride was challenged by his reading of St. Augustine of Hippo.

Augustine, not unlike himself, in his early years was driven by ambition, ego and the quest for worldly glory. He too passionately pursued status within the intellectual and secular aristocracy.

Vance said St. Augustine helped him to see there was a higher purpose, and eventually he returned to the Christian fold. Now he is trying to live out that faith even as he struggles with the complexities of government.

Vance and his young whippersnapper law school friends are not the only ones susceptible to pride of the unhealthy sort. We've all been guilty of it.

We need the candor of John Henry Newman who in his hymn "Lead kindly lights" cries out

to God -- **“Pride ruled my will; remember not past years.”**

Returning to Belshazzar’s feast of man. In this account we are reminded not only of the danger of pride, but’s also of its twin sister, idolatry.

You might be saying that idolatry is hardly a problem today. Neither we nor any one we know – unless they are Shinto – have little shrines with carved gods in our homes.

No doubt that is true, but idolatry goes much deeper. It happens when people make ultimate what is transient . . . what today’s passage calls “the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone.”

In an old Camel cigarette commercial from the 1960s, a man is pictured sitting comfortably with his legs propped up. In clear view is a hole

in the soul of one of his shoes. The caption reads: **“I’ll walk a mile for a Camel.”**

Well, there you have it. An idol is anything you’ll walk a mile for . . . anything you’ll do anything to get. For whom or what would you walk a mile?

I dare say we all have idols we need to cast down. Identify them and go to work putting them in their proper place.

Idolatry, as I have already suggested, is closely related to pride. One form of idolatry is making ourselves god . . . heaping glory on our achievements . . . saying, look what I did rather than what God did through me.

No doubt, this was the sin of Belshazzar. He saw himself on the top of the heap . . . the one who was able to bestow honor on others . . . the unconquerable.

Belshazzar should have known better than to fall into this trap. After all, his grandfather Nebuchadnezzar fell into it and had to learn the lesson of humility the hard way.

After crediting himself with all his wealth, power and success, God humbled this great king publicly by causing him to go mad. For seven years, he was forced to live outside and live like an animal . . . to eat grass like an ox.

It was only after Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged God as God, that his sanity was restored and he was able to resume his kingly authority.

Belshazzar apparently had forgotten history. So great was his hubris that – as I have already mentioned – he called for the golden vessels which had come out of the Temple in Jerusalem, those set apart for the service of God, to be brought and used in his “feast of man.”

What happens when you worship that which is not God, when you fall into the sin of idolatry, is that your humanness gets deconstructed.

For Nebuchadnezzar that meant becoming like a grass-eating animal. For Belshazzar, that meant first being consumed with fear that made his knees shake, then with the loss of his soul (his life).

It is a fearful thing to trifle with God. May we learn from these two men of history.

Remember Daniel's interpretation of the second word that appeared on the wall: **Tekel . . . "Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting."**

We don't want at the end of life's day that word – Tekel -- spoken of us. Rather: **"Well done, good and faithful servant . . . enter thou into the joy of thy lord."**

And there is no reason we should not hear these latter words. God's provision of grace is plentiful as we see pictured in the second feast, the one I am calling "the feast of God." I am, of course, speaking of Jesus feeding the physically and spiritually hungry in today's Gospel.

As you probably know, there are two distinct feeding stories in the Gospels. In the first, the number listed is 5,000. This feeding seems to have taken place on Jewish territory. In the second, the one recorded in today's Gospel, the number is 4,000. This miracle seems to have taken place in Gentile country.

If this indeed be the case, this second feeding points to the world-wide scope of Christ's mission. His concern and provision is for all. He wants all to come to His feast.

All who receive Him, all who give Him their allegiance, regardless of their race or place, are

given a place in the enlarged family of Abraham.

The feeding of both the 5,000 and the 4,000 show the power of God to triumph over all obstacles.

The castles we build are subject to destruction. The plans we make often go awry. The places we think safe often reveal themselves as not . . . the walls of Babylon are NOT impregnable.

In the end, we have to choose to which feast we will go – the feast of man, which leads to loss and ruin, or the feast of God which leads to blessing and life.

You are being bidden to THIS latter feast this morning. Come without delay. Come, taste that the Lord is good . . . that His mercies are forever sure. Come to the Lord's table.