Fr Matthew Charlesworth, SJ
https://sj.mcharlesworth.fr/

Thursday of the 20th Week in Ordinary Time

Date: Thursday, August 21, 2025 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** C
First Reading: Judges 11:29–39a
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 40:5, 7–10 | **Response:** Psalm 40:8a, 9a
Gospel Acclamation: Psalm 95:8
Gospel Reading: Matthew 22:1–14
Preached at: the Chapel of Richartz House **in the** Archdiocese of Harare, Zimbabwe**.**

Dear brothers in Christ,

Some choices bring life. Others take it away. Some words open the heart. Others close it.

In the first reading, we meet Jephthah. He is about to go into battle. He is afraid. So he makes a vow to God: “If You give me victory, I will offer in sacrifice whoever comes out of my house to meet me.” And it is his only child, his daughter, who comes to greet him.

It is a painful story. The Scriptures offer no rescue, no miracle, no escape—only silence. The Church Fathers read this story as a warning. Not just about rash promises, but about the danger of treating God like a god who demands human suffering to be pleased. That was never the way of the God of Israel.

But fear can confuse us. Fear can make us forget who God really is.

Jephthah wanted to control the future. He spoke too quickly. And his words trapped him. We, too, know what it is to speak out of fear. To act too fast. To try to bargain with God. Even in prayer, we can find ourselves saying, “If You do this, I’ll do that.” But that is not trust. It is not faith. It is still trying to hold on.

The psalm gives us a different voice: “Here I am, Lord; I come to do your will.” No deals. No pressure. Just a heart that is open. A will that is ready.

This is the voice of true prayer.

CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 · https://sj.mcharlesworth.fr/homilies/2025-08aug-21-yc-ot-20/

We hear it again in the Suscipe—that quiet, strong prayer from the Spiritual Exercises: “Take, Lord, and receive… all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, my entire will.” This is not a vow. It is a surrender. Nothing is held back. Nothing is bargained for. It ends, “Give me only your love and your grace, that is enough for me.” That line is not a deal—it is a discovery. A quiet recognition that if we have God, we already have everything.

That is the prayer of someone who knows that God is already good.

In the Gospel, Jesus tells a story about a wedding feast. A king prepares a banquet, but the guests refuse to come. So others are invited—people from the streets. But one man arrives without the proper clothing, and he is turned away.

The point here is not about clothes. In Jewish thought, clothing often stood for the heart—your spiritual state. Saint Paul says, “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ.” The man without the garment has come to the feast, but he has not changed.

God invites all, but He still calls us to conversion. The door is open, but we must walk through it with a heart that is ready. Grace is free, but it asks something of us. It asks that we be willing to grow.

Today we remember Saint Pius X. He wanted the poor and the young to receive Holy Communion often and early. He knew the Eucharist is not a reward for the good—but food for those who are still on the journey. He worked to make the way to Christ simpler, not harder.

We are called to do the same.

Here in Zimbabwe, the feast of God is not a far-off image. It is here, wherever people share food, water, healing, and knowledge with justice. But even in those places, we are asked to wear the garment of Christ—kindness, mercy, honesty, trust.

So today, let us not rush to fix or promise or bargain.

Let us listen.

Jephthah shows us what happens when fear shapes our prayer.
The psalmist shows us what freedom sounds like.
And Jesus reminds us that God wants us at His table—but with hearts that are

CC BY-NC-ND 4.0 · https://sj.mcharlesworth.fr/homilies/2025-08aug-21-yc-ot-20/

willing to be changed.

Let us ask:

- Where am I still making bargains with God, instead of trusting Him?
- What old attitudes—pride, fear, control—do I need to take off?
- And how can my prayer this week help make a way for someone else to come to the feast?

Source: https://sj.mcharlesworth.fr/homilies/2025-08aug-21-yc-ot-20/

This homily is shared for personal and pastoral use. Please attribute the author and do not alter the meaning when quoting. If you wish this homily to be translated - there is an option on the website which will allow you to translate it into the language of your choice.

Licenced under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0) license.

The author does not speak for the Society of Jesus or for the Catholic Church.

Receive Fr Matthew Charlesworth's Homilies on **WhatsApp**

Receive Fr Matthew Charlesworth's Homilies on **Telegram**

Receive Fr Matthew Charlesworth's Homilies on **Signal**

Scan for Website on **Clearnet**

Scan for Onion Mirror **via TOR**

In preparing this homily, I consulted various resources to deepen my understanding of today's readings, including using Magisterium AI for assistance. The final content remains the responsibility of the author.