

50 Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A October 15, 2017
Isaiah 25:6-10 Psalm 23 Philippians 4:10-14,19-20 Matthew 22:1-14

Every time Jesus speaks to us in the Gospel, the words He speaks are meant to change our lives forever. Today is no different. Out of His love for us, Jesus gives us a parable that is meant to teach us a great deal about heaven, about preparing for heaven, and about how to prepare for what is the greatest foretaste of heaven here on earth, *the Mass. The Mass is heaven on earth!* (Saint John Paul II)

Picture Jesus walking up to you *now* and giving you a personal invitation to His wedding banquet. What might your response be? Would you be ready now and wearing the proper wedding garment for going to His wedding banquet?

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells a parable of a royal wedding feast where the King is giving an invitation for everyone to attend. The King is God, and the wedding is for His Son, Jesus, who is the Bridegroom. The Bride is God's people, *all of us!* Thus, the people at the wedding feast are the family of God. God desires everyone to sit at His banquet table with Him in heaven. All we have to do is say "yes" and accept God's invitation to be a member of His family. No one can say, "But I was not invited."

The Catholic Church has always believed, from the beginning, that the Mass is a participation in that eternal wedding banquet here on earth. As we participate in the liturgy of this Holy Mass, God increases our desire and readiness for the heavenly banquet that is to come. The Mass helps us to prepare for the wedding feast in God's Kingdom. *But* there is a warning for the people. Those who accept God's invitation must be ready and be wearing a wedding garment. In other words, they must have prepared themselves to be part of the heavenly banquet.

In terms of our readiness, we need to be always prepared, because the messenger announcing that the feast is ready could come at any time. The messenger could be in the form of a death from a car accident or from an illness. We don't know the day or the hour that we'll be personally called to attend God's heavenly wedding banquet, when our earthly period of preparation will be over.

We can learn a lot in today's parable from those who gave excuses not to attend the wedding. And how many people today use the same excuses for not coming to

Mass that Jesus describes in the parable in refusing the invitation to His wedding banquet: work, housework, family, laziness, sleeping in, sporting events, holidays, etc.

We miss the point if we think that the parable is about wearing the right outfit to the wedding. No, Jesus' message goes much deeper than that, for although God the Father opens wide the doors of heaven and invites everybody into His kingdom, entrance is by no means automatic and can never be taken for granted. We have to be spiritually prepared *every day*.

How do we prepare ourselves spiritually for Mass? What are the spiritual clothes we will wear? In his letter to the Colossians, St. Paul says, "As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with the virtues of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony" (Col. 3:12-14).

What grabs our attention is this Gospel reading is the man at the back who came without wearing wedding clothes. That person accepted the invitation but was not properly dressed. The man who came in without wearing a wedding garment symbolizes a life that has undergone no changes, a life that has not produced the fruits of repentance, love of God and neighbour, and a daily carrying of one's cross. This detail expresses an important caution for us. We need to give up our old clothes, that is, our old habits of sin and put on the new clothes of Catholic discipleship.

It is not just the saying of prayers but it's the surrendering of our hearts and lives to God in prayer that counts. It is not just the number of words we say but it's the kind of life and heart from which the prayer comes that counts. It is not just being in Church but it's how deeply we participate in the Mass that counts. It is not just knowing the faith but it's living it that counts. These are the keys that unlock the door to enter the banquet of God's life with Him in heaven.

Do we look forward to Mass as the great opportunity it is to hear the Word of God speaking to us, to receive Him within ourselves when we come to receive the Holy Eucharist? Do we look at the Mass as the most important time of our week or just as another obligation we have to do? Do we take the time to pray and fast one hour before receiving Holy Communion?

If we arrive at Mass more as a spectator than as a participant, if we don't sing and join in the communal prayers, if we try to hide ourselves behind a pillar and evaluate the quality of the Mass by how fast the priest finishes, or if we sleep during the Mass or let our minds wander or keep looking down at the floor, what type of preparation do you think that is as a preparation for heaven, where we will raise our minds and eyes to *Behold the Lamb of God*, where we will sing God's praises with the angels, where we will be in an eternal communion of love with our brothers and sisters, and where we will rejoice in God's presence, not just for an hour, not just for a day, but forever. I don't think any of us would want to take a chance on missing out on that.

God tells us today, "Come to the wedding banquet!" He says it both about the Mass and about heaven. Preparing well for Mass each time we come will help us to always be ready for the eternal wedding banquet. If we are truly ready for this banquet every Sunday, we'll be ready to respond with joy, readiness and an immaculately white wedding garment, free of sin and full of virtues and love whenever our Lord comes to take us home, because we have put God first and given Him our best each day of our lives.

The one thing necessary is to make sure that we will arrive safely to the banquet by responding to God's love. We are never nearer to that love than when we accept the invitation to come to Mass here and sit at Jesus' banquet table. We come forward at Mass to receive the Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity of Christ in Holy Communion. Receiving the Holy Eucharist is a foretaste of the most beautiful heavenly wedding banquet that is to come when we leave this world.

God's banquet is available to all people, but only those who are willing to give their lives to the King, to God, will experience its joy. God doesn't force salvation on us. The invitation is freely given, but accepting the call is up to us.

The symbol of the wedding garment is the white garment received at Baptism. The white garment is put on you and the priest pronounces that you are now clothed in Christ. Baptism is our invitation to the feast, our participation in the promises God made to the Israelites of old.

We are all called but we have to accept that call. Our entry to the banquet is not just a baptismal call to which we or our parents responded years ago. We must wear

the garments of our Baptism *now*. It is the baptismal life of our acceptance as a new Catholic that counts, not just the baptismal certificate.

Our eternal future rides on our acceptance of God's invitation! So, the questions for all of us to consider are: "Am I responding to the Lord's invitation to the wedding banquet of His Son? Am I too preoccupied with worldly affairs and excuses to accept it humbly? Am I prepared to accept God's invitation to join His family at the wedding banquet? When was the last time I cleansed my white Baptism garment from its stain of sin in the Sacrament of Confession, the Sacrament of Reconciliation?"

Am I properly dressed for church? What kind of life am I bringing to this Eucharistic banquet? What is the condition of my baptismal garment these days? Have my baptismal promises been long forgotten and discarded? Is my Baptism just a memory or is it an active commitment shaping my life and my priorities right now?" These are all points for us to ponder this week.

If your baptismal promises are still shaping your life, and if you accept the invitation to discipleship and come here clothed as one truly trying to live up to your call in Baptism, then at this sacred banquet of the Mass you will receive God's promise that eternal life is yours. You will receive His guarantee that He will be your strength to help you come to the heavenly banquet that will never end.