

52 Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A October 11, 2020
Isaiah 25:6-10 Psalm 23 Philippians 4:10-14,19-20 Matthew 22:1-14

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells a parable about a royal wedding banquet where God is giving an invitation for everyone to attend. The wedding feast is a familiar image that Jesus uses to describe the reality of grace. Marriage means an intimate, loving, permanent union between two people. This is exactly what God's divine life is for each of us.

In the parable today, the wedding banquet is an analogy for the fullness of life to which God is calling us to share with Him in the kingdom of heaven. It is a call to intimacy with God, and to a deeper and more authentic personal life. But it is also a call to be in community with others.

At the banquet, the king symbolizes God, the wedding is for His Son Jesus who is the bridegroom, and the bride symbolizes God's people, all of us! Thus, the people at the wedding banquet are the family of God. Our God is a loving God. His desire is to have everyone sit at the table of His banquet in heaven. To do this is simple. All we have to do is say yes and accept His invitation in order to be a member of God's family. No one can say, "*But I was not invited.*"

Excuses, excuses! You *have* been invited! At the time of Jesus, the Pharisees and the chief priests are refusing God's invitation. Listen again to the parable: "*they seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them.*"

The king is angry because His second group of slaves is killed, so He sends out new slaves to "*invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet. Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad.*" Jesus emphasizes that Our Lord's invitation to the banquet is not an exclusive, high-society event. All are invited regardless of their state in life, position in the community, material wealth, race, age, sinner, poor, or handicapped. The mixing of social groups was just as radical a concept in Jesus' time as it is in ours today. The invitation by the king, and the refusal of those who are invited, show us that grace, God's gift of divine life, can be freely accepted or freely rejected.

Matthew has skillfully combined the story of today's parable of the wedding feast and the wedding garment as salvation history. The wedding represents the marriage of

God and humanity that took place when the Son of God took on our human flesh. We hear, *“the wedding is ready . . . go to the crossroads.”* The servants at this point now in the story represent the Apostles who were sent to the crossroads of the world to invite everybody to the wedding feast of God. This means that both the Chosen People, the Gentiles, and all of us in this day and age are invited to God’s wedding banquet. But there is a warning for the people. Those who accept God’s invitation must be seen wearing the wedding garment.

In terms of salvation history, commentaries write that wearing the wedding garment can be understood in two ways. The commentaries write that the first symbol of the wedding garment is the white garment received at baptism. The white garment is laid 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. The white garment or wedding garment is a symbol of a life in the footsteps of Christ. Baptism is only the beginning of that call to spend our lives with Christ. The question we must ask ourselves is: How am I now living that life?

In the second interpretation of the wedding garment, we think of it as the Sacraments received after our Baptism. These are Confession, Confirmation, and Holy Eucharist for they represent the necessity of divine grace, in addition to our human effort. Whoever underestimates the need of divine grace and neglects the ordinary means of grace, such as prayer and the Sacraments, will be found as not wearing the royal wedding garment.

Through two of the Sacraments we receive, the Holy Eucharist and Reconciliation, or Confession, we may receive God’s graces as many times as we want. We receive the wedding garment of grace when we receive the Sacraments, but we must also continue to wear this garment in our Christ-like living each day.

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 the 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 Christian discipleship. It is not just saying prayers but opening up our hearts and lives to God in prayer that counts. It is not just the number of

words we say but the kind of life and heart from which the prayer comes that counts. It is not just being in Church but how deeply we take part in the Mass that counts, although it may be online Masses because of the pandemic. It is not just knowing our faith but living it that counts. These are the keys that unlock the door to the power of Christ, the kingdom life for us and give us entry to the banquet of God's life.

As we participate in the liturgy of this Holy Mass, perhaps online for many people today, God increases our desire and readiness for the heavenly banquet that is to come. How do we prepare ourselves spiritually for Mass? What are the spiritual clothes we will wear? St. Paul writes, in his letter to the Colossians, *"As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony."* (3:12-14)

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 heavenly banquet you will receive God's promise that eternal life is yours. Our eternal future rides on our acceptance of God's invitation!

Are you responding to the Lord's invitation to the wedding banquet of His Son? Are you too preoccupied with worldly affairs and excuses to accept it humbly? Are you prepared to accept God's invitation to join His family at the Wedding Banquet? When was the last time you cleansed your white garment in the Sacrament of Confession? These are all points for us to ponder this week.

We need to consider our own personal faith. Will we have faith and trust in Jesus by which He invites us into the banquet of God's kingdom? Or will we be shut out in that great darkness in which we will be unable to find words that express the pain as our voices wail and we gnash our teeth in despair? If we respond to the invitation offered to us, we can say with Isaiah: *"See, this is our God in whom we hoped for salvation ... we exult and rejoice that He has saved us."*

On Monday we will be celebrating Thanksgiving Day. On this day many people look forward to a delicious meal of turkey, cranberry sauce, mashed potatoes, and pumpkin pie. But Thanksgiving Day is not just about having a delicious turkey dinner, it

is about giving thanks to God for the many graces and gifts He has given us. It is a day when we express our gratitude to God. Thanking God is at the heart of our salvation.

There is the story of two angels that God sent out each day to travel around the world. The first angel collected all the people's petitions and the second angel collected all the people's thank you's. At the end of the day the angel's basket with the petitions in it was overflowing, while the angel's basket with the thank you's in it might only have one or two notes, and sometimes it was empty.

When we express our gratitude to God, it reminds us that everything we have we owe to Him. Today, have you placed a thank you note to God in the angel's basket of thank you's?