

28th (QA&SJ) Sunday in Ordinary Time year A

A spinster said, “When I was younger I hated going to weddings. All of my aunts and the grandmotherly types would come up to me, poke me in the ribs and laughingly, tell me, ‘You’re next.’ They stopped doing that after I started doing the same thing to them at funerals.”

The internet, television and social media have sufficiently covered and brought into our homes royal weddings, the nuptials of political and social celebrities, movie and TV stars. Since these are not ordinary celebrations there is a limited guest list. Those in “*high society*” pray to be included on such VIP lists. Rarely does anyone refuse the invitation; it is indeed a great honor to be invited to such an occasion. In ancient Jewish culture wedding celebrations were not only occasions for sharing the couple’s joy or merely meals to fill up the stomach but also to fill up hearts — a way of uniting families and tribes. In our Gospel and in the first reading, the final triumph of God’s Kingdom is imagined as, “*a feast of rich food and choice wines.*” No doubt it is his sure hope that this banquet awaits him in God’s future that allows St. Paul to live with feast or famine in the present.

The parable of the wedding feast presents God as king. The most honorable and deserving the highest respect of his subjects, guests, and visitors. As St. Matthew sees it, however, the feast is ready, even now. The king shows his benevolence by inviting not only the rich and the influential but also the less privileged to a lavish banquet

in honor of his son and his bride. Our hearts may feel sorry for the poor man not properly dressed and thrown out. *Is this not a bit too much?* If we think the parable is about wearing the right outfit, we miss the point. The message goes much deeper, because what the banquet refers to is eternal life in heaven. *God's kingdom welcomes all.* Salvation is freely given to everyone, but is *never automatic* and *should not be taken for granted.* It is not as easy as that, for we've got to work for that salvation. As the homily last Sunday reminds us, "*we have homework to do,*" be spiritually prepared, and prove ourselves worthy of the invitation. Jesus warns them admission to the feast is not enough, they must put on the wedding garment - which refers to living seriously moral and spiritual values, crucial to an active life of faith by living lives worthy of the Gospel.

Those who fail to dress up properly think merely completing the sacraments is enough. But it also involves moral responsibility. God's invitation is entirely free, never depending on the recipient's status or prior merits. In short, salvation is both *a gift and a task.* One of the '*unfeastly*' sights for the Lord is when we believe we are being pious and prayerful, yet when challenged to apply Christ's teachings in all aspects of life—*social, civil* and *economic* we fail to stand for these values and principles. God always invites us, but we often refuse. His invitation is given freely, gratuitously, with no strings attached or compulsion to abide.

We may not have totally ignored God's invitation, otherwise we would not be baptized Christian and would not be here today. But we're still on our way to the great banquet. And the danger for us is that we may allow the affairs of this world, our business, and our pleasures to distort our vision of the real goal in life. As Jesus said, "*What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world, but suffers the loss of his soul?*" The irony of life is that we can be so busy making a living, that we may fail to make a life. The question is: *how are we living that life?* The Jews made the fatal mistake of presuming their special role as God's chosen people, but failed to take the offer seriously. This can be *our* story if we think that because we are baptized and are regular church-goers that we have done enough. As we go about our daily struggle of trying to make ends meet, it's so easy to leave God out of the picture. Every day is an invitation from God. Every person is a gift, every opportunity an offering, and every moment an open book to be enjoyed. Yet we look elsewhere or prefer to do other things. Only after the moment has passed do we realize what we have missed.

Our gospel should cause us to pause and think about the wonderful future that is within our reach. It is telling us that God is longing for our homecoming in the next life. Meanwhile one necessity is to make sure that we will arrive safely by responding to his love. We are never nearer that love than when we come forward at Mass to receive Jesus in Holy Communion and when in our daily lives we avail of the opportunities of

sharing in Christ's life. *By beginning our day with a prayer or asking God's blessing before we eat or drive a car, offering encouragement and support to our neighbors, and sharing our gifts to our church and community.* Through these acts we are extending this brief spell of Eucharistic celebration into every detail of our day. Let us take this invitation seriously. When we love others as Jesus loved us, when we put into practice what we believe, then we have said "Yes" to the banquet of God's love. Someday, how delightful it will be to hear at the gates of heaven, "*You're next—come good and faithful Christian inherit the kingdom prepared for you!*" Amen!