

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time + 15 October 2023 + Isa 25 + Phil 4 + Mt 22:1-14

As most of us do before any major life event, I sent out a number of invitations to family members and friends prior to my priestly ordination. While I knew that many would not be able to attend, I have to admit that I was a little surprised that a not small number of invitees never responded at all, not even with a “no”. I have to admit, that hurt a little.

Well, I got over it. With St. Paul in our 2nd Reading today, I am learning how to find peace in Christ alone. I know how busy people are these days. So often when we ask people how they are doing, their response is, “I’m so busy.” But that’s really the problem, isn’t it? Contrary to popular belief, busyness, in and of itself, is not a virtue. In fact, I fear that a great many people are purposefully busy, in order to ignore the questions that arise when they happen to have a moment of quiet time: *What is the meaning of life? Is there life after death? Am I content with how I am living my life? Am I having any lasting influence?*

So now let’s look at the parable in our Gospel today. At first, the King’s actions might seem harsh. But think about it: the person who is throwing the feast is not just some peasant like me, but is a King! So who would pass up an opportunity to feast at the table of the King? Yet what happens? *Some ignored the invitation and went away, one to his farm, another to his business. The rest laid hold of his servants, mistreated them, and killed them.* Ouch! It’s one thing to ignore an invitation. But to kill the messengers—what kind of people is this? And so we hear that the enraged king *destroys the murderers and burns their city.*

Very likely, Jesus is using over-the-top images here to grab the attention of His audience. In a similar theme to our Gospel last Sunday, Jesus is calling out His own people for rejecting the prophets, and rejecting Him. So why do they reject Him? Well, for some, it is simply because they were just too busy in worldly pursuits. After all, they have farms to tend and businesses to mind. It still happens in our day. I’m too busy to go to Mass. I’m too busy to pray. I’m too busy to spend time in Scripture. I have work to do. It doesn’t help that society tells us that we are only valuable if we are productive. And yet I’ve never heard anyone on their deathbed say: *if only I had spent more time at work!* Even worse, some of the guests kill the servants—that is, the prophets that God sent to His people in the Old Testament. Tragically, Jesus Himself will be killed in a similar way.

Moving on in the parable, after the first guests reject the invitation, the King tells his servants to invite anyone they can find. In the original context, Jesus is prophesying the opening up of the Kingdom even to the Gentiles. But if we are to apply this parable to our lives now, I think it actually speaks very well to many of the controversies harming the Church today. I don’t know how many of you are paying attention to the synod going on in Rome. Honestly, I think it’s better to leave it all up the Holy Spirit and not get too wrapped up in the intrigue and confusion, and just pray. But in a nutshell, this parable teaches us that yes, the Kingdom of Heaven is radically inclusive. Everyone is invited to the banquet.

After all, the Father wants all of His children to be with Him in His heavenly Kingdom. But, as we already said, some willfully ignore the invitation. Even worse, we hear that some are cast out because they willfully refuse to wear a *wedding garment*, even though in ancient times the *groom himself* provided such garments for his guests, leaving them without excuse. Just as no one would come to a wedding today in dirty work clothes, evidently people in the time of Christ also wore wedding special garments. So what exactly is the symbolism of the wedding garment that Jesus is getting at here?

Well, there are 3 likely explanations, all of which come from the book of Revelation. First, in Revelation we hear heaven compared to a great marriage banquet. In the Wedding Supper of the Lamb in heaven, Jesus Christ—the Lamb of God—is the Groom, and His Bride is the Church. The Bride, we hear, is *clothed with fine linen, bright and pure, and the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints* (19:8). So the wedding garment may be the good deeds that make our souls ready for heaven. Not that we can earn our way into heaven, but we also cannot enter heaven without keeping the greatest commandments: love of God and love of neighbor (Lk 18:18), and everything else that these commandments entail.

Next, in heaven, Revelation says that those who endured persecution on earth without giving up their faith in Christ—most especially the martyrs—*have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb* (6:11, 7:14). So perhaps our wedding garment is the faith that we treasure in our hearts, even in spite of persecution and trial.

Finally, the wedding garment may be the human soul after baptism, which has been cleansed of all sin and so becomes *white as snow* (Isa 1:18). Jesus promises in the Book of Revelation that those who die in a state of Grace; that is, those *who have not soiled their garments...shall be [clad] in white garments*. Then He says, *I will not blot his name out of the book of life; I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels* (cf. 3:4-5).

If we put all of these together, Jesus is teaching us two very important lessons. First, there is no human activity that qualifies us to be too busy for God when He calls. Next, we must not think that just because a person is sincere, they have an automatic ticket to heaven. I know that is the popular belief these days, sometimes even among people in the Church, but it is not true. Yes, the invitation of grace is given to all, and we should strive eagerly to welcome all people to the Feast. But, as we know, some will accept this invitation, others will reject it by refusing to believe, or by refusing to live according to God's commands. God does not overrule our free will, and He cannot be mocked (cf. Gal 6:7).

And so the call of this parable is to seek to keep our baptismal garments unstained by sin, and to persevere in an active, living faith, all the days of our lives. Only in this way will we someday find the peace that we so long for in the eternal wedding banquet of heaven, the so-called holy *mountain* of God of our 1st reading today, where *the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from every face and he will destroy death forever* (cf. Isa 25).