28th Sunday in Ordinary Time + 11 October 2026 + Isa 25 + Phil 4 + Mt 22:1-14

If you consider the Gospel parables we have heard over the last few weeks, taken together with those that are to come through the end of Ordinary Time, you will notice there is a growing sense of urgency. We are moving to the end of Matthew's Gospel, which means that the Lord's passion is coming soon. So in His final days, Jesus seems to have two goals: He is making a final effort to convert the hardened hearts of the Jewish people's religious leaders, as well as warning them of the consequences of their obstinacy.

So 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 a King, who is ready to go all-out celebrating a wedding feast for His son! Who in their right mind would pass up an opportunity to feast at the palace of the King? In our day, it would be like turning down an invitation to a state dinner at the White House. Yet what happens? *Some ignored the invitation and went away, one to his farm, another to his business.* It's bad enough to turn down an invitation to a king. But to simply ignore it?! That's a real insult to the host!

But it gets worse. *The rest laid hold of [the King's] servants, mistreated them, and killed them*. Yikes! It's one thing to ignore an invitation. But to kill the messengers—what kind of people is this? So the enraged king *destroys the murderers and burns their city*, which is a prophecy of what is soon to come: the Romans invading and burning down Jerusalem in 70AD. Similar to our Gospel last Sunday, Jesus is warning His own people of the inevitable consequences for rejecting the prophets and refusing to repent.

So why won't they heed His warning? Well, for some, it is simply because they were just too busy in worldly pursuits. "All this business about the Messiah finally arriving and inaugurating His kingdom is fine and well but I have mouths to feed and work to do." It still happens in our day: "I'm too busy to go to Mass, too busy to pray, too busy to serve the Lord. I have work to do, mouths to feed, sports to get to." Many people today don't formally profess atheism. Rather, they just don't care about God; God means nothing to them in their busy daily lives.

At the other end of the pendulum, there are those even now who are extremely zealous, but they worship a false god who is no god at all, and are even ready to kill in his name. It's amazing, and tragic, how quickly our nation seems to have forgotten the evil of Sept. 11, 2001. So it was in Jesus' day too: we hear in the parable that some of the invitees even kill the King's servants. He is speaking here of the OT prophets, sent by God, that were killed by their own people. But He is also prophesying His own coming murder by those who thought He was blaspheming.

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 apply this parable to our lives now, it speaks very well to one of the biggest questions facing the Church today; that is the tension between being inclusive and keeping discipline. In a nutshell, this parable teaches us that yes, the Kingdom of Heaven is radically inclusive. Everyone is invited to the banquet. Because the Father wants all of His children to be with Him in His heavenly Kingdom. But in order to live in the Kingdom, you also have to abide by its rules.

So what's the deal with the seemingly arbitrary rule of wearing a *wedding garment?* Well, in ancient times the *groom himself* provided such garments for his guests, so they were without excuse if they showed up without one. Just as no one would come to a wedding today in dirty work clothes, evidently people in the time of Christ also wore special wedding clothes. But there's more to it than just fashion and propriety.

There are 3 images from the book of Revelation that help explain the wedding garment. First, in Revelation we hear, fittingly, heaven compared to a great marriage banquet: "the Wedding Supper of the Lamb," where Jesus Christ—the Lamb of God—is the Groom, and His Bride is the Church. The Bride, we hear, is *clothed with <u>fine linen</u>, bright and pure,* and *the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints* (19:8). On earth, people are often valued by things like fashionable clothes. But in heaven, the Saints are distinguished by their good deeds.

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 <u>robes</u> and made them white in the blood of the Lamb* (6:11, 7:14). So perhaps the wedding garment is the faith in Christ 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 <u>white garments</u>.* Then He says, *I will <u>not</u> 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, the warning: there is no human activity that qualifies us to be too busy for God when He calls. And no one has an automatic ticket into heaven. Yes, the invitation of grace is given to all, and we should strive eagerly to welcome all people to the Feast. But the invitation can be rejected: by refusing to believe or by refusing to live according to God's commands.

And second, the call: to accept the invitation, and hold on to it, by seeking to keep our baptismal garments unstained by sin, and to persevere in an active, living faith, all the days of our lives. This is the only way to *live in the house of the Lord all the days of our lives*—to remain in the eternal wedding banquet of heaven.