

[Readings: Isaiah 25:6-10a; Psalm 23; Philippians 4:12-14, 19-20; Matt 22:1-14]

The parables of Jesus, to the attentive listener, are often haunting.

Jesus is drawing on the rich image of the wedding banquet in the prophet Isaiah. The wedding feast that will unfold on the mountain of the Lord includes guests from all the nations. There will be wine and food. All that divides the nations will be destroyed. Every people and nation will be united in their adoration of the living God. Then Jesus gives a well-known story a twist ending.

The universality of the kingdom of heaven is the response of men, women and children to the surprising invitation to the wedding feast of the Lamb. Many are invited. Let us not suppose that accepting the invitation is enough. Every child, woman and man is invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb. What is needed on our part is preparation. We must put on our wedding garment of holiness, of righteousness and justice. It's what's inside that counts.

Dear friends, Jesus speaks to us through this parable today, because the time to wear the wedding garment is now. The king is coming to examine the good and bad guests of this feast. There will be a judgment for each one of us. You may not know that in the time of Jesus, wealthier wedding hosts had closets full of ornate, silk wedding clothes with golden lining and trim for those guests who came unprepared.

If Catholicism has become boring to us — old hat, a series of pious rites we perform Sunday after Sunday — it is time to clean and repair the wedding garment of our desire for God.

It is not enough just to be among those at the wedding. Our sanctification requires us to give up the bitter silence of ingratitude and speak words of lament and praise to the triune God. The wedding feast is here. Prepare your garment before the wedding, and be prepared to display it after the wedding. Don't keep it hanging in the closet, gathering dust.

You and I receive two invitations every Sunday. It isn't just a wedding. It's not just a matter of showing up. It's not even a matter of what we wear, although fifty years ago women and girls wore dresses and men and boys wore ties.

It's also a matter of what we do. What we do with our relationship with God and His Church. What we do with the members of our family. The invitation starts with grace. God's grace-filled invitation is for each one of us to come to see Him, to know Him, to love Him and to serve Him.

All of us are invited. Whether we are upright or immoral, everyone receives the Divine King's invitation. God doesn't care if you have more skeletons in your closet than a Halloween supply store. The King wants people to this feast of "juicy rich food and pure, choice wines!" Come to the mountain! Come to the feast!

What does it mean when we are not dressed properly in the right "wedding garment?" In baptism, each one of us received a baptismal garment, whether it was a christening outfit or a white colored dress or suit. St. Paul says we are to be clothed with "compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience, and above all, love." THIS is the kind of outfit you and I are to "wear." Putting on the robes of Jesus Christ is risky. It means laying ourselves open to being made new and changed to look like Jesus Christ Himself. Are YOU ready to take the risk? To be Christ for one another and to do His work?

Accepting God's invitation to come to Church and to come to know Him more deeply is not only for our spiritual refill and renewal; it's also to allow God to shape and mold us into the people God calls us to be.

We cannot be self-centered and make excuses for not accepting the invitation. God won't be ignored unless we choose to ignore Him. Make the right choice. Jesus is commissioning all of us as his modern-day disciples. We are to preach repentance, which literally means, a new way of thinking. A new way of looking at things. Knowing Christ means seeing our world differently.

Jesus calls us His "witnesses," martyrs in Greek. Are you willing to risk knowing Christ and giving witness to Him, even to the point of broken relationships, rejection, injuries, setbacks, tragedies, abuse and crimes against you? "I can do all things in Him Who strengthens me" says St. Paul in our Second Reading today. I have this slogan on a pillar candle given to me by a dear friend. It sits in my living room as a daily reminder.

During His life on earth, Jesus Christ was accused of eating with sinners. He still does that every Sunday with us. We are the sinners He eats with. Sinners who have hope for redemption and a seat at the Heavenly Banquet.

Talk about a "Happy Meal!" AMEN!