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A seminary classmate of mine hated the parable we just heard in this morning's Gospel. To my classmate this parable, especially the part about the man without a wedding garment being *thrown into outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth*, proved that Jesus was intolerant and prejudiced. He also presumed that Jesus was not all that sympathetic to the poor and that Jesus implied that *the many called and few chosen* would not include the poor. One can only imagine what new labels Jesus would be given if He taught this parable today. Yet, removed from the two-thousand-year-old time and culture in which this parable was given, it does seem like a parable of extremes. An invitation to a wedding feast was turned down, the servants who hand delivered the invitations were mocked and murdered, the King's army was dispatched, and the murderers were hunted down and executed, and their city burned to the ground. The King then invited everyone and anyone to His son's wedding feast and when one is found wearing the wrong clothes he was thrown out of the banquet and cast into Hell.

What does Jesus mean by this parable? This parable makes more sense in the light of Jesus' culture and salvation history. To turn down an invitation today is hardly a cause for insult. To accept an invitation and send a reply, or to RSVP, used to be good etiquette. Today those preparing a wedding dinner know to expect that everyone who was invited may not be able to attend. However, in Jesus' day, the custom was to send two invitations. The first invitation was the RSVP, the second invitation was to let those who had RSVP'd know that the wedding banquet was ready. To accept the first invitation and then turn down the second invitation was a great insult. By accepting the first invitation, those in the parable had vowed to attend the banquet. To fail to follow through by attending was a grave insult to the king and therefore treason. But not only do they decline the call to the banquet, they mock and murder the King's servants who were bidding them to the banquet. The insult is made worse since the host was the king. Given this, the invited committed treason by insulting the king and bearing arms against his emissaries. For any king to send in an army after treasonous murderers and to burn down their city would have indicated a serious offense indeed. After all, kings in Jesus' day, even the kings of Israel, were notorious for doing far worse to unruly and treasonous subjects.

Then the king does something unexpected; he commands his servants to go out in the highways and byways and find people to come to his banquet. By doing

so the king filled his banqueting hall with all types of people: rich and poor, Jew and Gentile, dangerous highwaymen and travelers and the lame and the blind. The king had prepared oxen and a fatted calf which would have been enough food to fill a village with plenty left over. And according to many commentators, the king would have also provided everyone who attended the wedding banquet with a wedding garment. To attend the wedding banquet in casual clothes, or an every-day-garment soiled from traveling and toiling in the fields or the market would have also been insulting to any host in Jesus' day. Not only was their food in abundance, but a wedding garment was provided for each guest, all they had to do was put it on and enjoy themselves. This is what makes the king so angry when he finds a guest without a wedding garment on. The man had no excuse for not wearing it, and his refusal to wear the garment that was freely given to him is another direct insult to the king. And for this last insult, the man is cast out of the wedding banquet, where there is wailing and gnashing of teeth. *For many are called but few are chosen.*

As with every Parable Jesus uses, this parable speaks allegorically and metaphorically of the truths of the Kingdom of Heaven. In this parable, God the Father is the King, who throws the wedding banquet, or the marriage supper of the Lamb, which we find in Revelation, for the marriage of his Son, Jesus Christ, to His Bride, the Church, at the end of the ages. God the Father has sent out invitation after invitation delivered by His prophets to His people of Israel, but they stoned and murdered the prophets. The invitation that was given even by the King's own Son was mocked and the Son of God was put to death too. Jesus tells this Parable as an analysis of Israel's past relationship with God and also as a prophesy and prediction of His final demise. When Jesus says that the king sent his army and their city was burned to the ground, He prophesies the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, the crown jewel of Jerusalem, *and not one stone [would be] left upon another.* God sent His messengers repeatedly to them because His desire for them to be with Him was so great. However, Jesus prophesies that God the Father would also send His servants, through His Apostles, out into the highways and byways to bring in as many as would come to the great banquet after His Resurrection and Ascension, when He would come again to judge the quick and the dead. And Jew and Gentile, rich and poor, saint and sinner alike has been invited to the marriage banquet which will take place at the end of the ages. The one requirement will be that we wear our wedding garments.

Jesus gives us a stark warning this morning that we are expected to wear our wedding garments or be cast into *outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.* Jesus uses this as an illustration of those who claim to follow and

believe in Him, who profess to be Christians, and yet refuse God's terms for hospitality. They want the Kingdom of Heaven on their own terms, refusing to live lives of faith, repentance, virtue, and charity. These are those who refuse to live out their Baptismal vows to renounce the world, the flesh, and the devil. They expect to wear the soiled garments of unrepentance to the great wedding banquet of the Lamb. They lay aside their Baptismal robes and vows and grievously insult the King of Kings. Jesus teaches that we will not gain entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven without keeping our Lord's commandments. His servants the Apostles, who we hear from this morning through St. Paul, again invite us to this great banquet but warn us to walk carefully that we do not soil our baptismal robes. St. Paul encourages us to receive the invitation and seek to understand the Lord's will and to remember that the Lord longs for our presence at His wedding banquet.

Let us remember that the Lord does not show partiality. He is not tolerant but long suffering and merciful. He is not intolerant of the poor. He has freely given everything that is needed for our entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven. He has sent out His messengers repeatedly to us, begging us to come to His wedding feast. He longs for us to be with Him. He has given us every warning, every commandment, He has even provided the garment of Baptism we must wear to His wedding. This morning His servants have called us to partake in a form of the wedding banquet here below. A heavenly banquet of bread and wine, the body and blood of His own Son has been prepared. The first course for that great banquet which is to take place at the end of the world when all things have been made right. All that is required is that we pledge to wear our wedding garments, to walk in all newness of life, in charity with our neighbors, and to keep the commandments of God.