



Things to Ponder

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Homily – Gospel of Matthew 22:1-14

Introduction: Am I Just Showing Up?

Immediately after criticizing the religious leaders through the parable of the tenants in last Sunday's Gospel, Jesus proceeds to tell another parable (yes, another one!) – again directed at the religious leaders. In this Sunday's parable of the wedding feast, Jesus offers an image of the Kingdom of Heaven – using the symbol of a wedding banquet. The parable Jesus tells is straightforward. The king dispatches his servants to invite the guests to the wedding feast that he is planning for his son. The first guests refuse the invitation. A second dispatch of servants follow. Again, some guests ignore the invitation. Some of the invited guests even go far as to mistreat and kill the servants. With the invited guests now deemed unworthy to attend the king's wedding feast, the servants are sent to the "crossroads" and invite whomever they can find. The guests arrive, but it appears that accepting the king's invitation brings certain obligations. The guest who failed to dress in the appropriate wedding attire is cast out of the feast. The parable concludes with this memorable sentence: "Many are invited, but few are chosen."

What is going on here? The parable seems so strange and unfair. It helps to read this parable as an allegory with a number of unrealistic details – but details that would have been easily understood by the Jewish-Christian community of that time.

The image of a wedding banquet is often used in Scripture to signify God's abundant care, both now and at the end of time. The Kingdom of Heaven is a place/state with joy, celebration, feasting, where all guests (a mix of all races, rich and poor, saints and those reconciled to God) delight in one another's company. The repeated invitations are reminiscent of the multiple ways God (the king) calls us to follow The Way – especially through Scripture, Church teaching, prayer, and the sacraments – especially the Divine Banquet of the Eucharist. We have the freedom to either accept or reject God's invitation.

The last scene is entirely unrealistic, but highlights Matthew's ethical concern: one must be ready at all times for the end-time banquet. The guest is tossed out of the wedding banquet for he just showed up without being "clothed with good deeds." The wedding garment clearly stands for faith and baptism combined with a lived-out commitment to the Gospel. Sadly, the guest just showed up and had no sign of living the Gospel throughout his life. In short, more is required of a disciple than just an initial acceptance of the *unearned invitation*.

This parable—or better yet, allegory—is a warning to the religious leaders (and ourselves also?) who are offered repeated invitations to accept Jesus and his Way. What has been our response to date to the invitation – perhaps even countless invitations?

I would invite you to take time to read and ponder the words from the Gospel of Matthew 22:1-14.

What word or words caught your attention?
What in this passage comforted you?
What in this passage challenged you?

Further Questions and Reflections:

The parable of the wedding feast was spoken when Jesus saw that his own people were moving to reject him. The story is symbolic, but the invitation to us is real. No matter how low a status or self-esteem I have - I am welcome. *Do we really believe that we are welcomed as we are? What blocks us from believing this Gospel truth?*

God's invitation to the great banquet is not restricted to the Jews, but open to all without any distinction – even to those who seem unworthy. *Whom do you see missing from our/your parish? Who should be invited? Can you identify them?*

God is inviting us to fill the place that is set precisely for us. What is your place? Can you name it? Are you and I living out what we claim to believe in?

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