



28th Sunday in Ordinary Time



Date: Sunday, October 15, 2017 | **Season:** Ordinary Time after Easter | **Year:** A

First Reading: Isaiah 25:6–10a

Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 23:1–6 | **Response:** Psalm 23:6cd

Second Reading: Philippians 4:12–14, 19–20

Gospel Acclamation: Ephesians 1:17–18

Gospel Reading: Matthew 22:1–14

Preached at: the Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Braamfontein in the Archdiocese of Johannesburg, South Africa.

Today's Gospel follows on from last week's – the one about the wicked tenants. Now Jesus is becoming even blunter in the way he makes his point. If they did not understand last week's parable, they have to, he thinks, understand this one. A marriage feast is a joyous occasion for any family. And when it is a royal family wedding, it's an occasion to celebrate for the whole kingdom. And indeed, if we listened carefully – everyone was invited. In fact, God's generosity was on display in all our readings today: We heard from the Prophet Isaiah in the first reading that “On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of choice wines—of fat things full of marrow, of choice wines well refined.” St Paul says in the Second Reading “my God will supply every need of yours”; and in the Gospel: “Go therefore to the streets, and invite to the marriage feast as many as you find. And those servants went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good” (Mt 22:9-10).

So God is generous. But what does he expect of us. That I think is the important question we need to ask ourselves today. It is the question about the guest who was invited, and arrived, but did not wear his wedding garment.

You see, the generous King would not have issued an invitation without also providing the necessary garment to enable them to attend. It was not that he was without it. Rather he chose not to wear it. And that is the insult to the King. That is the insult to God. For God asks nothing of us that he does not believe we can do. And he offers all the help that we need to do it. Our part is to accept God's help.

Remember that this is not just about a wedding feast. It is an allegory about the coming of the Messiah. Jesus is saying that Israel's leaders, and the many people who followed them, were like guests invited to a wedding—God's wedding party, the party he was throwing for his son. But by not recognising Jesus as the Messiah, they were refusing to come. The Messiah was here, and yet these people did not want to know about it. They had abused and killed the prophets who had tried to tell them about it, and the result was that their city would be destroyed. It would be judged. If we stopped there, there would not be much Good News in this parable, but of course we have to look deeper. There is Good News in this gospel, though not perhaps for the people who had received the original invitation – or heard the news first. Jesus is saying that God was sending out new messengers, but to the entirely wrong parts of town, to tell absolutely everyone and anyone to come to the feast. And we're told that they came! We do not have to look far in Matthew's gospel to see who they were. The tax-collectors, the prostitutes, the riff-raff, the nobodies, the blind and lame, the people who thought they'd been forgotten. The people on the margins, those who were excluded, or felt themselves not good enough. They were thrilled that God's message was for them after all. In fact, is it not odd that there is a story about a wedding feast, and it's not the Bride's dress that is at issue, but the guest's. That's because God cares for each person. Each person matters. That is why our good God is so generous.

But there was a difference between this wide-open invitation and the message so many want to hear today. We want to hear that everyone is all right exactly as they are; that God loves us as we are and does not want us to change. People often say this when they want to justify particular types of behaviour – and how good are we at justifying ourselves, telling ourselves that God loves me even if.... but when we're honest, we know that argument does not work. When the blind and lame came to Jesus, he did not say, 'You are all right as you are'. No! He healed them. They would not have been satisfied otherwise. When the prostitutes and extortioners came to Jesus, he did not say, 'You're all right as you are'. His love reached them where they were, but his love refused to let them stay as they were. Love wants the best for the beloved. Their lives were transformed, healed, and changed. A fundamental tenet of Ignatian Spirituality is that our deepest and truest desires for ourselves are God's deepest desires for us. But God wants us to be happy, fulfilled and in relationship with him. We cannot be in relationship when we are sinning. God forgives, but we must do what Jesus

tells the woman caught in adultery: “I do not condemn you, go and sin no more.” He expects us to change. He expects us to become holy. And he gives us the tools, the graces and the sacraments to help us to do that. But we have to try.

In fact – it’s quite a basic fallacy to imagine that God wants everyone to stay exactly as they are. Just think about it. When we say God loves everyone, we obviously include those most difficult to love. For example, God loves serial killers and child-molesters; God loves ruthless and arrogant businessmen; God loves manipulative parents who damage their children’s emotions for life. If he did not, God would not be loving everyone. But the point of God’s love is that he wants them to change. He hates what they are doing and the effect it has on everyone else—and on themselves, too. God hates sin. But he loves repentant sinners. Ultimately, if he’s a good God, he cannot allow that sort of behaviour, and that sort of person, if they refuse to change, if they refuse to become holy, to remain forever at the feast he’s throwing for his son. And that is what is happening at the end of the Gospel with the man who was sent away because he refused to wear the garment the King provided.

The point of the story is that Jesus is telling the truth, the truth that political and religious leaders often like to hide: the truth that God’s kingdom is a kingdom in which love and justice and truth and mercy and holiness reign unhindered – and to whom everyone is invited. And it is these qualities that are the clothes you need to wear for the wedding. And if you refuse to put them on, you are saying you do not want to stay at the party. That is the reality. If we do not have the courage to say so, we are deceiving ourselves, and everyone who listens to us. Being a Christian, means being someone who has converted their lives, their being, to Christ. They are trying to be like Christ. Hence the word Christian. When we stop doing that, or allow ourselves to think that Christ would act in ways we know he would not, then we are no longer really Christian. We are hypocrites – and we know what Our Lord says about them. But the Good News is that God is merciful and always forgives us when we do sin. That’s not what we’re talking about here. It’s when we refuse to acknowledge that sin is sin, and refuse to repent. Then we are like the guest at the party, refusing to wear the garment that God gave us.

So let us pray this evening that we might have the courage to not be complacent about God’s Good News in our lives. Let us consider where in our lives – whether it’s in certain behaviours or habits, friendships or relationships, attitudes

and ideas – where exactly are we being called to change, to put on Christ as it were. And let's ask for the grace and courage to do so. To turn towards our God, and celebrate with him worthily. Let us give thanks tonight at this Eucharist, that God is ever generous and is calling us, and we are saying Yes to God. Let us clothe ourselves in love, justice, truth and mercy so that we might rejoice in the generosity of our God who loves us, and wants us to change into our better selves. To become the person God created us to be – and deep-down, we know we all want to become.

Amen.

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