

## Ordinary 28A - 2023

### **Late have I come for the Heavenly Banquet!**

An old couple, having been married almost 60 years, died in a car crash. They had been in good health for the previous ten years mainly due to the wife's interest in health, food, and exercise. When they reached the pearly gates, St. Peter took them to their mansion which was decked out with a beautiful kitchen and master bath suite, Jacuzzi and lavish buffet breakfast. "How much does it cost to eat?" asked the old man. "Don't you understand?" Peter replied. "This is Heaven, it's all free!" After a sumptuous breakfast the old couple went to the clubhouse of Heaven's extensive golf grounds and saw the lavish buffet lunch. "Well, where are the low-fat and low-cholesterol tables?" the old man asked timidly. Peter replied, "That's the best part...you can eat as much as you like of whatever you like and you never get fat and you never get sick. This is Heaven." — The old man looked at his wife angrily and said, "This is all your fault! If it weren't for your bran muffins and sugar-free diet, we could have been here ten years ago!"

### **The Parable of the Wedding Garment:**

This parable is a modification of two rabbinic stories well-known to Jesus' audience. In those days, participants in a banquet were expected to dress in clothes that were superior to those worn on ordinary days. Guests who could afford it would wear white, but it was sufficient for ordinary people to wear garments as close to white as possible. It was customary for the rich hosts to provide their guests with suitable apparel. For royal weddings, special outfits were given to any guests who could not afford to buy their own. Hence, to appear in ordinary, soiled working clothes would show contempt for the occasion, and would be an **unspoken refusal to join in the King's rejoicing**.

***"Wearing the wedding garment"*** means living out the Gospel message. We are called to live the moral and ethical values embodied in Jesus' life in earth in flesh and time, and in his teachings. In other words, the "wedding garment" in the parable refers to true discipleship rather than uncommitted membership. The parable means that when one freely accepts Christ as one's Lord and Savior, one must dedicate one's life to Jesus. In other words, the Christian must be clothed in the spirit and teaching of Jesus. Grace is a gift and a grave responsibility. Hence, a Christian must be **clothed** in a new purity and a new holiness. In other words, while God, through the Church, opens wide His arms to the sinner, the sinner can only accept His invitation to this relationship of mutual love by loving Him back, and so by making

some effort to repent and change his life. It is not enough for one to say, "I believe," and then simply to continue living one's life in one's accustomed sinful ways. Although Jesus accepted the tax collectors and prostitutes, he demanded that they abandon their evil ways ("Go, and sin no more!")

The permanent and universal lesson taught by the parable has nothing to do with the actual clothing we wear when we go to Church. But it has everything to do with the spirit in which we enter God's House. It is true that Church-going must neither be a fashion parade nor an occasion of scandal for others, but the garments of the mind and of the heart we wear when we go to worship God are more important than our material clothing.

The *wedding garments* are the garments of penitence, Faith, reverence and Love.

The parable ends on a slightly pessimistic note: "*For many are called, but few are chosen.*" It is a sad fact that, although everyone is called to experience the love of God, relatively few will really try to follow His teachings.

Here is Bible scholar Daniel Harrington's comment on the wedding garment: "Mere acceptance of the invitation, however, does not guarantee participation in the banquet ... Guests at a wedding banquet would be expected to appear in clean and neat clothing. When the king (God the Father) sees a man who is not dressed properly, he questions him in a cool manner ("*My friend*") and has him ejected from the banquet hall. Being a [tax](#) collector or prostitute is no more a guarantee of salvation than being a Pharisee or chief priest; rather, one must receive Jesus' invitation and act upon it so that when the banquet actually begins, one will be properly prepared to participate ...

The invitation to the kingdom has been offered to all kinds of people, but only a few of them [act](#) upon it in such a way as to be allowed to participate in the banquet of the kingdom."

Matthew's point is that there is no privilege to the kingdom based on status. Only a life of transformed attitude and performance counts as a valid wedding garment which will get a person into the kingdom of God. **Mere presence will not do.** Thus, Matthew undermines the "us and them" beliefs prevalent among the Hebrews (who believed that they were "God's chosen people") and which Matthew feared might creep into the Christian community.