

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time (A)
(Isaiah 25:6-10a / Matthew 22:1-14)
15.10.2023
Invitation/Acceptation/All/Love

Today's parable begins with an invitation to a wedding feast. The word "invitation" is repeated 4 times and it says something important about how God relates to us: he does not impose himself, he neither coerces nor ensnares us. God invites us. As a consequence, we will never stress enough the fact that faith and our belonging to the Church are a free response to God's initiative. You and I are here today because all of us chose to be here not because we were obliged to be here.

The challenge for us is that in order to give answer to God's invitation we must listen to it. It is interesting to notice that the Greek expression translated by "they were not interested" is found many times in the New Testament. It could have been translated as: "They did not care" or "They paid no heed". Eugene Peterson translates it this way: "They shrugged their shoulders and went off" (*The Message*).

Clearly they were not against the wedding feast, they just expressed their lack of interest in it. And here lies the problem for many of our contemporaries, they are not interested in the Church which they find irrelevant, in a God who seems moody and distant nor are they interested in Christians who do not live what they preach.

The theologian Fr. Tomáš Halík notices that "if many atheists reject human theories about God, it does not necessarily mean that they are closed to the mystery we designate by the word God" (Lecture, 13th Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation, Krakow, September 2023). What we should do is not to judge and condemn those who do not answer the invitation to join a Christian community but rather ask ourselves whether or not our lives and the lives of the Churches bear witness to the mystery of God, "Christ himself" (Col 2:2). Are we Christlike to the point that people around us see Christ when they look at us?

The gift of faith and the fellowship of the Church are not reserved to a select group. In Portugal, Pope Francis reminded young people that "in the Church, there is room for everyone. Everyone. In the Church, no one is left out or left over. There is room for everyone. Just the way we are. Everyone." (*Hom.*, 03.08.2023). And 2 weeks ago, at the opening of the Synod of Bishops, celebrating the Eucharist with the new Cardinals, Pope Francis declared again: "The doors of the Church are open to everyone, everyone, everyone!" (*Hom.*, 04.10.2023)

These words are an echo of the order given by the king in the parable: "Invite everyone you can find" and we are told that the servants "gathered together everyone they could find, bad and good alike."

At the moment in our Churches there are too many men and women who find closed doors when they come to us, there are too many men and women whom we quickly label as "bad" and whom we prevent from joining us.

At this time when the Catholic Church is engaged in a synodal process, it is important to remember that the adjective "Catholic" means "all-embracing." If we want to be faithful to our identity as Catholics, it is absolutely necessary for us to be, as Pope Francis encourages us "a Church that looks mercifully at humanity. A Church that is united and fraternal, that listens and dialogues; a Church that blesses and encourages, (...) a welcoming Church, not one with a closed door." (*Id.*)

The parable ends with the guest who is without a wedding garment. What is this wedding garment? Among the many answers which have been given, I am inclined to agree

with the 6th century Pope, St Gregory the Great, who believed that “love is the wedding garment” because according to the Gospel of St John: “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son for us.” (*Hom.*, 38:9)

It is not enough to come to Church on Sundays, it is not enough to claim to belong to a Church, it is not enough to follow the rules. What gives the right to stay at the wedding banquet is love, humble, selfless and generous love.

In the desert, in the 5th century, “somebody asked an elder, ‘How is it that nowadays there are those who labour each in his way of life but do not receive grace the way those of old time did?’, the elder replied, ‘There was love in those times and each one promoted his neighbour. But now that love has grown cold, each one demotes his neighbour; that is why we do not receive grace’.” (N. 349/23)

What today’s Gospel parable teaches us is that we are called to imitate God’s boundless and generous love, a love which should be found and experienced in our hearts and in the Church, a love which should be shared with all, not only those we like, those with whom we agree, those who worship or vote in the way we do.

If our decisions, at personal, ecclesial and national levels, are fear-driven and self-centred – as we hear at the moment from some of our leaders – then we will prevent the kingdom of God which is a kingdom of love from growing in our midst. Only love begets love.

As Christians, we have the duty to remind ourselves and others that only love begets love and life. May we invite one another in the Church, and all those we meet in the world, to the banquet hall in the kingdom of God. In the place of the wedding feast, there are many rooms where all men and women, yes all, can feel welcomed, loved, forgiven and encouraged. Therein, together, we will be able celebrate and rejoice, because we were dead and have come to life; we were lost and have been found (cf. Lk 15:32).