

Decked Out In Christ

October 11, 2020, 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Gospel of Matthew 22:1-14

Fr. Brad

In last weekend's Gospel, Jesus compared the world and its people to tenants in a vineyard, given the responsibility of managing and taking care of that vineyard. Rather than seeing this as a privilege, the tenants abused their roles and through self-interest tried to take over ownership of the vineyard and make their own rules.

In today's Gospel, Jesus in a similar vein uses the image of a wedding banquet, whereby the King has his slaves go out to the already invited guests to get a count. All invited guests are disinterested in following up on the invitation and make excuses, clearly demonstrating their complacency about the event. Jesus parable is directed against the elite opponents from Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders. Matthew and Luke both include this banquet parable in their respective Gospels but there are differences.

In Luke's account, '*someone who was planning a great dinner*', faces excuse by all the invited guests. So he proceeds to *invite the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame* - in other words, those on the margins of society, and upon discovering there was still room, instructed that invitations be extended on the streets and lanes and compel people to come so his house would be filled....none of *those originally invited would taste his dinner*.

Matthew's account is harsher. In his narrative, it is *a King having a wedding banquet for his son*. The invited guests are disinterested and bow out and some go so far as to abuse and killed the messenger slaves. The enraged King then *sends* troops to destroy those murderers and burn their city. He then has his slaves *go out to everyone they could find, both good and bad*.

The man without the wedding robe is unique to Matthew's Gospel. What is it about this scene? What is it about the lack of a wedding robe that results in the invited guest being thrown out?

Some suggest the robe represents our reception of the sacraments such as baptismal garment. However, there are no guarantees that simply being baptised is alone enough to automatically get one into heaven. Just because we have received that sacraments and continue to, does not automatically mean we are a loving person as Jesus personifies and teaches us to become. So the garment probably does not represent the sacraments.

St. Paul, in his 1st letter to Timothy, points out that the aim of this instruction is.... love that springs from '*a pure heart, a clear conscience, and a sincere faith.*'

That is the kind of love that is the wedding garment.

So, does the man without the garment represent a person who is holding back something?

Well, perhaps it provokes a question within each one of us - 'Are we holding back anything from our God? Are we willing to let go of our own sense of security, our worldly identity, our ego, and allow God to transform or infuse that identity with Himself. Who do we belong to, really? If we belong to Him, would we not be willing to allow ourselves to be clothed with His identifying garment.

Such a garment may also express respect for the host. Do we really see our King as our King, the one who can look after His people like no other? Without it, one may be seen perhaps as a holding onto a disposition of entitlement rather than gratitude.

So, how is it that we go about allowing ourselves to be 'clothed' in Christ?

It is by our accepting God's generosity when it is given. And included in this would be recognizing there is a time and a place for feasting and for fasting as well. And not to resist either, when it is the right time for it. Also, it is wrong to adopt a stance of only giving or only receiving. There is a time for both. Jesus knew this and lived it. He was not afraid to feast and embrace all the good things in life and he then when it was time he let it all go - - life friends peace and possessions, all out of love.

Are we allowing ourselves to be affected by the message of the Gospel?

Can we come to accept God's will as our own?

As much as we are meant to celebrate our uniqueness before God and participate in a way that is unique to us, we still must find a way to live by that unifying reality that identifies us as belonging to the Father through His Son and thereby with each other - - a symbol that is parallel to having our lamps ready for the bride groom or feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and housing the homeless.

As we hear His Word in Scripture and receive Eucharist together, may we truly grow in our willingness to allow ourselves to be 'decked out in Christ?'