

Sunday Homily

18TH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

11 OCTOBER 2020

YEAR A

“Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.”

Matthew 22:9

Illustration

Throwing a party can be a tricky and stressful business. How many people should be invited? What if no one turns up? Then there's the reluctant guest who makes excuses – the one who says, “I've got to stay in to wash my hair,” or says that they just can't find a babysitter. And there's the gatecrasher who doesn't belong.

Today's Gospel speaks of God's kingdom as a party, and the giving of it must have been about as stressful as ever. The people who were invited just would not come. Some of them wouldn't take it seriously, and went off to do their own thing – as if a person would say, “Sorry, I can't come to your party – I have to go to the superstore.” And others seem to have been so insulted to be invited that they beat up and even murdered those who came to fetch them. What was it about this party that made it so unappealing?

Gospel Teaching

A welcoming feast for all is one of Jesus' favourite ways of speaking about the kingdom of God. But there are a few disturbing features to this particular description: Jesus really stresses God's anger at being rejected; the host in the story is absolutely furious with those who would not come. And as for the man who does come but wears the wrong clothes – he is cast out into the dark. So what on earth are we to make of this picture?

Jesus is warning us against being too complacent. Yes, God truly does offer us a place in his kingdom, promising to fulfil every one of our needs, to wipe away our tears and remove our guilt and our shame, as Isaiah said. But God deals with us as adults, not as little children. God is no magician or fairy godmother who waves a magic wand to make everything work out well in the end. He is a God who invites us not simply to take our places at his banquet, but actively to prepare it with him, to begin the work of building up his kingdom in our own lives and in the world in which we live.

St Augustine suggests that the reason the man in the story is ejected from the banquet is because the garment which he lacks is the one essential for the kingdom of heaven: love. The wedding garment is a symbol: to enter the kingdom of God,

we need to repent and have a change of heart, but that is not the end of the story. This repentance must be continued in a life of love and compassion. Christians who fail to lead a life of service to others will find that merely acknowledging Christ is not enough: they run the risk of being cast out of God's kingdom into the darkness because they have failed to clothe themselves in the garment of love.

Application

We say that God is love and we might be tempted to use that fact to excuse any real effort on our part to bring God's love to the people we meet. If so, we are like the man without the wedding garment: he had failed to prepare and just turned up, expecting to be admitted. But the kingdom of God is not like that. We are given opportunity to choose in our lives, and the choices we make have enormous consequences. People often make light of the Christian faith – the Church tends to be seen sometimes as an ineffective body of people who hold tea parties and jumble sales. In fact, for all its faults (and there are very many) the Church, as the means of communicating the Christian faith, is certainly not something to be made light of – for if the Christian faith is true, then it is, quite literally, a matter of life and death.

Other people oppose the Church and the faith for which it stands with a real loathing and hatred, like the people who murdered the slaves in the parable. And others find themselves in it but not really knowing why – thinking they can be a Christian without letting it touch them – like the man without the wedding garment. The parable tells us that how we respond to God's invitation is vitally important – as members of the Church, and as people at the party, let us make sure that we do our part to make the invitation clear.