

28th Sunday of the Ordinary Time

Jesus again in reply spoke to the chief priests and elders of the people in parables, saying,

"The kingdom of heaven may be likened to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son.

He dispatched his servants to summon the invited guests to the feast, but they refused to come.

A second time he sent other servants, saying,

'Tell those invited: "Behold, I have prepared my banquet, my calves and fattened cattle are killed, and everything is ready; come to the feast."'

Some ignored the invitation and went away, one to his farm, another to his business.

The rest laid hold of his servants, mistreated them, and killed them.

The king was enraged and sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city.

Then he said to his servants, 'The feast is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy to come.

Go out, therefore, into the main roads and invite to the feast whomever you find.'

The servants went out into the streets and gathered all they found, bad and good alike, and the hall was filled with guests.

But when the king came in to meet the guests, he saw a man there not dressed in a wedding garment.

The king said to him, 'My friend, how is it that you came in here without a wedding garment?'

But he was reduced to silence.

Then the king said to his attendants, 'Bind his hands and feet, and cast him into the darkness outside, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.'

Many are invited, but few are chosen."

Mt 22:1-14

Who doesn't like a good party? Honestly, I don't like parties.

I don't like being in a crowd of people that I don't know. I don't like screaming at each other over the loud music while nursing the same beer for the whole evening. I don't like pretending to have a deep conversation with a person I've never met before. I don't like this all-embracing pressure to be happy. I don't like parties, and I'm not surprised that the invited guests didn't come.

The more I read Jesus' story though, the more I realize that my vision of a party is somewhat skewed. I notice that there is a preconceived notion in it. I detect in myself a preordained judgment about the purpose and nature of the festivities. I presume shallowness and dishonesty, both on the part of the guests and on the part of the host. I presume the fun-time is a job, an effort to advance self or to gain something. A chore.

Is that what happened to the invited guests? Did they choose their own little worlds because they didn't want to be bothered by something they cannot benefit from? Did they beat the servants and reject the invitation because their immediate problems seem much more important than the wedding party for the king's son? This is what must have happened. Now I understand the guests and their motives.

Now here comes the big surprise. I realize to my own astonishment that when I tried to figure out who were these ungrateful guests, I caught a glimpse of my own true self, my own motives. I realize that I had created in my heart an image of God that is made out of my own fears. I seem to rely on that image even when the words of the Scripture and my own experience deny it. I still quietly follow that image, I call it my "spiritual intuition," and I never question it because I'm afraid that I would have to change my life. This is the moment when I say "No, thank you" to God's invitations.

What should I do now? I should recognize the king who is inviting me. How do I recognize him? This is why Jesus offers us the image of people brought to the party straight from the main roads. Those random travelers all of a sudden find themselves in the middle of the lavishly prepared wedding party. They are to celebrate the wedding of the king's son. Everything is beautiful, and everything is completely free with no strings attached. Even, following the ancient middle eastern tradition, a fine wedding garment is provided for the guests to wear and enjoy. It is very hard not to gasp.

To my deep surprise, I recognize that God is precisely the opposite of what I suspected him to be. He is thoughtful, he is generous, and he loves his son and his guests.

This difficult story told lovingly to the chief priests and the elders of the people, and to me, forces everyone to ask tough questions: Who is my God and king? Who is my real God and king? Did I turn true praise to God into my own spiritual exercise? Did I lock myself in the cage of my problems and my daily worries, my political convictions, and my guilty pleasures so much that I cannot be happy when praise is given to God? Am I so narcissistic that I have to leave the party the moment the conversation stops being about me?

What if I have become that person? Receive the wedding garment of God's word, put on the white robe of God's liturgy, accept the difficult gift of your brothers and sisters who by their greatness and their weakness will show you the true face of God and the true dignity of your own existence. Only then you will not be silent when the Lord approaches you at his banquet. You will know how to mingle with the King and Creator of the universe, how to sing a divine hymn of praise.