

What do you wear to a wedding? The short answer is, "It depends." Some weddings are quite informal, and you can get by with jeans and a dress shirt. Other weddings can be quite formal, and coat and tie are the bare minimum. If you are the bride, of course, a whole separate set of conditions apply. In that case there's a good chance you have spent a lot of time and money on what you are going to wear. I have yet to see a bride arrive at her wedding in torn jeans and a baggy sweatshirt.

The gospel for today puts wedding dress at the center of the discussion. How the guests have arrived at the wedding is a journey full of twists and turns. By their own choice the original invitees are not there, and there has been quite a lot of conflict involved in that whole part of the story. But this wedding is a big affair. It's the king's son who is getting married, so we can assume that the conditions, and expectations, for the wedding will reflect that reality. Even if your own wedding tended toward the more informal, a royal wedding does not go that route.

The second round of invitees, even though they were not on the original guest list, knew what they are being invited to. And the majority understood what was expected of them in terms of how to dress. The one who didn't do so could not plead ignorance. There must have been a different cause.

The theologian John Shea, in his take on this parable of Jesus, points out that nowhere in the story does the bride make an appearance. He ties together the imagery of the wedding feast of the king's son with that of the Church as the bride of Christ. From this sort of perspective, all the participants at the banquet make up the bride and the way they dress for the wedding should be comparable to what a bride would do. The attire should be quite special.

Of course, the wedding imagery stands for something about the nature of the God's invitation and the expectations it carries with it, and the nature of the response of those being invited. Some brides may have their wedding dress all picked out before a proposal is even made, but I'm guessing that once there is an invitation to be married, the planning for and procuring of the proper outfit proceeds apace!

So it is with the Christian journey of faith. Although we have been invited after the original invitees failed to respond, and it was a gracious act on God's part to ensure that the wedding would go on anyway with an appropriate celebration. Still, it is a royal wedding and banquet and ought to be celebrated as such. The outfit recommended by the letter to the Colossians contains the following articles:

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance

*against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do.
And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection. (Col. 3:12-14)*

The wedding dress that the bride of Christ wears is procured by steady practice of the virtues listed by St. Paul. These sorts of things are not something we do once and that's it. They are habits of behaving that are cultivated early on and practiced over the course of a lifetime.

We are the bride of Christ. All of us as the Church altogether. And we are expected to act accordingly. Along with the invitation to the heavenly marriage feast, though, comes a voucher, what we need to procure the our wedding garment: The grace of the Holy Spirit provides us with the capacity to practice the virtues that fit into the life of the kingdom and which will ensure that we are well appointed in our wedding attire and look like we belong there, whatever the means by which we received the invitation.

There is no substitute for the works of the Holy Spirit. Memorizing the bible or the catechism of the Church will not suffice. Our garment has to be the virtues and spiritual qualities such as those outlined by St. Paul. Without them we will simply not fit in, not belong there, and will not be allowed to ruin the occasion.