

October 11, 2020 Come To The Wedding Feast Homily: In 1956, a vivacious, young American actress, Grace Kelly, entered into the covenant of Christian marriage with Prince Rainier of Monaco. Dubbed the “Wedding of the Century” by the international media the event was widely covered and attended by seven hundred guests. Several members of the royal houses of Europe were on hand to witness the blessed event. Quite unexpectedly, no one from the British Royal Family attended the wedding. They sent their regrets. It was reported that the young queen of England, Elizabeth, offered an explanation for her refusal to attend the wedding. She said, “There would likely be too many movie stars there”. Her absence was likely disappointing to the people of the small principality of Monaco. Even more insulting was the attitude of many of the “blue bloods” the aristocrats in attendance, who looked condescendingly on the Kelly family and their guests. They were considered uncultured and unsophisticated. To put it another way, they were on no one’s “A” list.

In today’s gospel (Mt. 22: 1-14) Jesus tells his story, the parable of the Wedding Feast, to those who are plotting how to do away with him: the chief priests and elders of the people.

In Sacred Scripture, the wedding feast is a universal symbol of communal joy. It is for joy that we, the People of God, are created. The king in the parable stands for the Heavenly Father. He wants to throw the greatest party on earth on the occasion of his beloved son’s wedding. The bridegroom in the story represents Christ. The sovereign ruler has watched carefully over every stage of its planning and execution.

To be invited by one’s king to his son’s wedding must have ranked as one of life’s greatest privileges. Clearly not all the invited guests shared this view. Those who rejected the wedding invitation made the fateful choice to go their own way. They simply could not take time off their busy schedules. The king insisted that his invited guests forsake all their concerns and activities and come to the feast. But to no avail. “The feast is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy to come”. (Mt. 22:8) As one scholar writes, “The unworthy person is precisely the one who has been offered something great, something wholly undeserved and turns it down”. God rewards and punishes on the basis of one’s acceptance of his call.

The parable makes reference to a wedding garment. “My friend, how is it you came in here without a wedding garment”, asked the king. According to scholars the wedding garment is a symbol of good or righteous deeds such as works of mercy, prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

A true story: Years ago I attended a wedding reception at the Turning Stone Casino in Verona, N.Y. I was dressed in my clerical garb, a black suit. I had some difficulty finding the banquet room. In such a spacious place, I found myself, quite by accident, in the gambling casino. A woman approached me, clearly agitated. “Why are you here?” She bellowed. “You are causing scandal. What are you, a Catholic priest, doing in a casino?” I explained that I was in search of the banquet room where the wedding reception was to be held. Alas, I could not pacify her. She walked away disgusted that a priest should be seen in a den of iniquity! If I had not been inappropriately dressed (my black suit), I would have been largely ignored in the large gambling venue. In retrospect, I might have asked her a pointed question: “and why are you here?”

In the parable there is the element of surprise. "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." (Mt. 22:9-10) At the end of the day, we are likely to be shocked in finding some of the least desirable people having a prominent seat at the wedding feast. If, as Christians, we are asked the question, "Where are you going?" One answer might be "I am going to a wedding feast! It is one of the splendid images of heaven, the mystery of our blessed communion with God, the bridegroom of the church, for all eternity. "Blessed are those called to the Wedding Feast of the Lamb", writes the author of the Book of Revelation.

The greatest obstacle to our admission to the Wedding Feast is not so much sin as such but the arrogant attitude that refuses to grasp God's hand when it is graciously and gladly extended to us.

Amen!