

Jesus tells the parable of the invited guests who refuse to come to the king's wedding feast for his son. When the invited guests refuse to show up, others are invited. But even here, a guest arriving without the proper wedding garment is tossed out. One is reminded of Ezekiel and the many prophets who tried to call Israel back to holiness. Exile to Babylon was the punishment for Israel's infidelity. We might liken the nation to the wedding guest who is tossed out of the banquet. How would you feel if you were that guest thrown out of the wedding banquet?

Sidney saw an ad in the newspaper, inviting anyone who thought they had acting ability to try out for an audition. Sydney was hungry and out of work. He thought to himself. 'I've tried responding to ads for dishwashers and janitors wanted, why shouldn't I try to be an actor?'

Hundreds of people responded to the ad and came to the theater, bad actors as well as good. The stage was full of wannabes. When the director arrived, he caught sight of Sydney and offered him a try out. One minute was all the director needed to size up Sydney. "My friend, how is it you came here? You have no training as an actor, you can barely read, and your foreign accent is so thick, no one will be able to understand you?" Sydney was slow to respond, so the director yelled at the top of his lungs, "Get out of here and stop wasting my time. Go get a job you can handle. Get yourself a job as a dishwasher." He motioned to two stagehands who snatched the script from Sydney's hands, spun him around, and tossed him out the door.

Sydney wailed and grinded his teeth. Although the director's words were harsh and unkind, Sydney realized that he needed to change. Sydney began by learning to read, and even though he had no real desire to act, he next set about to learn acting. With practice and determination, Sydney finally landed a small part in a little play. One job led to another, and another and another. Over half a century and 56 movies later, Sidney Poitier looks back to the day he was thrown out of his first audition as the day that changed his life for the better.

Although the exile of the Israelites to Babylon was a very harrowing experience, we know that it became a life changing event in the history of the Jewish people. In time, they did come around and they were restored to their homeland. Certainly, today's reading is one filled with hope:

I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit within you, taking from your bodies your stony hearts and giving you natural hearts. I will put my spirit within you and make you live by my statutes, careful to observe my decrees. You shall live in the land I gave your ancestors; you shall be my people, and I will be your God (Ez 36:26-28).

And what of us? If you had to audition for a role as a disciple of Christ would you be invited for a starring role or tossed out by the seat of your pants? Failure often teaches us many more lessons in life than success. In failure we are open to change and growth. In failure, we may finally let down the walls we put up and be ready to listen to God. In failure, we often find the motivation to work harder.

In the depth of our own failures Christ is ready to lift us up to undreamed of heights. Jesus suffered and died for our sins on Calvary. To the world, his death was an utter failure. But in the greater mystery of his passion, death and resurrection, death was conquered. Sin was vanquished. We never wish pain and suffering on anyone ... but when we unite our own failures with those of Jesus on the cross, suffering can teach us much. Indeed, the apostle Peter teaches "if you are patient when you suffer for doing what is good, this is a grace before God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his footsteps" (1 Pt 2:20-21).