

19th Sunday after Pentecost- EF 2014

MATTHEW 22:1-14

Deacon Pat Hall

Heaven: our eternal destiny in faith and hope.

Heaven: the Kingdom's reign of love on Earth for which we pray.

Our readings today are flush with extravagant images of the great heavenly banquet “where all the hungry are filled with good things”. (Luke 1: 53)

God's revelation communicates spiritual reality to us created beings.

But our senses are more keenly developed for what we call physical reality.

I'm thinking God would just call it all one reality of creator and creation.

We do have a certain spiritual sense,
but it doesn't have the clarity that our physical senses have,
like in detecting the shades of color in our autumn leaves
or distinguishing one bird's song from another.

That is why we need Revelation and the Sacraments to help us embrace a reality beyond our understanding.

Yet, although divine wisdom is beyond our understanding, we seem to have been designed to try to understand, sometimes even desperately so.

Today we hear the physical language of a sumptuous feast to describe the complete spiritual fulfillment for which we were made.

The use of food works for me.

While I've been fortunate to never having been really hungry,

I do see people who are.

We all see starvation on the news channels.

We have people in our parish who have gone on mission trips and witnessed true starvation and malnutrition.

Our St Mary's crew sees families every Monday night at the food pantry who are coming to provide food for their youngsters.

Images of a great boundless feast must sound heavenly to them.

And while we describe Heaven as a place free from pain and suffering where all is bliss, our Gospel passage today reveals it to be even more.

It describes Heaven as a wedding.

A wedding is where a groom and bride find their completion of self in each other.

In the heavenly wedding feast, we are to find ourselves, our true meaning, in our relationship with God and each other.

The King's invitation is of course God's invitation, an invitation that is rebuffed with indifference and even violence.

Have you ever experienced that kind of rejection?

At the time, Jesus was pointing the accusing finger at the Scribes and Pharisees.

We certainly see how the 21st Century has rejected God with indifference and violence.

Our Gospel is a cautionary tale of the eternal consequences of such rejection and that certainly doesn't include anything like feasts and wedding bliss.

Those of the chosen who rejected the invitation were left to their own demise.

The invitation to the heavenly wedding banquet is offered to all, good and bad alike.

One couldn't be good enough to secure an invitation.

It was offered to all as free gift.

So they responded from near and far, just as we respond today from near and far.

We respond to the promises of bounty.

We respond to the offer of fulfillment.

We respond to the offer of intimate relationship with the divine.

You see we are not just invited to be partakers of bounty and bliss.

We, as church, are called to be the very spouse of Christ.

It is for that wedding that we were made...

to be in loving relationship with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, as a people... as a people in loving relationship with each other.

Folks, this is an all-in or not-at-all proposition.

Our "all-in" may be compromised by our selfishness, by our concupiscence,

and by our flirtation with evil.

But by responding to the graces freely offered by God, especially through His Word and the Sacraments, we can continually and repeatedly respond with Mary's fiat, her yes and our yes that it be done according to his word. (Lk 1: 38)

But what about this poor guy that came not dressed in a wedding garment? He was bound and cast out.

At first blush, this could offend our sense of charity.

To this day, my 96-year old father speaks of his not being able to attend his own high school graduation because he did not have good enough clothes to wear.

But surely, this man was not bound and cast out because he was not good enough.

Jesus throughout his ministry came to call sinners.

The man was left behind in the dark because he did not come prepared to participate in the wedding feast.

There was no confusion about what type of event to which he was called. He showed up, but was not ready to participate and so participate he did not.

Again, is this not yet another cautionary tale for us?

The invitation to come to Jesus' altar is here.

We come prepared to participate, yes even in the clothing we wear.

Fr. Grondz and I have certain ministerial roles in our participation seen clearly by the vestments we wear.

Even as we vest for Mass, there are special prayers for the donning of this and the next article of clothing, submitting to the Lord's graces in preparing our hearts to participate and serve in holiness.

I remember at Jan's and my wedding 38 years ago the beautiful dress that she wore made by her own hands.

She even made the tie I wore from the same material of her dress.

It was all part of our coming prepared to participate in the Sacrament that would nourish us for all our married years.

As we come to Jesus' altar, have we dressed our hearts prepared to participate in Christ's joyful communion, his heavenly banquet? Are we prepared to accept God's graces to:

love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your being, with all

your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself? (Lk 10: 27)