



Homily for 10/11/2020

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time A

Very Rev. J. David Carter, JCL, JV

Once again, we are presented with an option for this Sunday's Gospel: A Long Form and a Short Form. I have preached about options like this in the past. It is a very unfortunate option, in my opinion. We can read the full-length, complete passage or we can read a curtailed and shortened version of it. But a quick study of the difference between the two will bring one to the reasonable conclusion that the editor gave an option in which a hard saying and truth was avoided and only a positive heartwarming message was allowed. Some will try to make the argument that the brevity of the short option is more pastoral. However, I believe this argument and many like it are disingenuous and are in reality very un-pastoral. If the purpose of being 'pastoral' is to bring the sheep to green pastures where they will have safe repose, then failing to tell them about the pitfalls of ravines, wolves and sullied water along the way, and the consequences of not following the shepherd, seems naive at best, and culpably negligent at worst. Woe to the shepherd who does not warn the sheep! It seems to me that many pastors for the past 60 years have thought the people of God too simpleminded or slow to be able to grasp these deeper truths. Or that somehow the truth was too hard to grasp and that ignorance was bliss. I get the sense that the leaders of the Church so want to "fit in" and "be liked" by the faithful that they have feed them candy instead of meat and vegetables. I can't help but feeling that by cutting out the hard sayings, there has been an attempt to water down the faith precisely in a time when we need the full nutrition of the Gospel truths!

In the long form of the Gospel we hear not only the good news that God has prepared a wedding feast to which even the lowliest on the earth are invited, but we also hear the reality that failing to answer the invitation invites destruction on us. Furthermore, it tells that if we fail to conform ourselves to the way of the Lord by putting on the wedding garment, even if we show up, there is wailing and grinding of teeth awaiting us, not feasting. This last part is what is left out of the short form. Perhaps there are reasonable motives for shortening the parable. But I fail to be convinced of this, especially in our day. Maybe it's as simple as people having something better to do on Sunday than listen to a minute more of the Gospel. This is something for our examination of conscience, for sure. But more likely, in my opinion, is it that we thought God's judgement to be too boorish or "mean"? Can we not square our pre-conceived and personal views about a "nice non-judgmental, teddy bear, good feelings dispensary god" with the stark reality of how He actually reveals Himself? And therefore we have to "shorten" the Gospel, lest God come off as too "harsh" for modern ears.

This is the dynamic at play in one of the most deceptive banner ads that is used in church circles today. "All are welcome," we declare. We turned it into a pop culture-inspired folk hymn. All are welcome! It seems such an obvious truth. You may wonder what in the world I might find difficult with this ever-so-popular catch phrase that makes people feel so good about themselves. Of course, all are welcome. How could anyone not be welcome in the Church, we ask. If you say that not all are welcome, you are just plain mean! You must be some kind of bigot. Maybe a racist, maybe a transphobic or an anti-feminist. That must be it. To counter this possibility, it is screamed all the louder, "All are welcome". But there is something very disingenuous about this phrase. It isn't bad, it is just a little "off" if one is a Christian. It isn't the full Gospel. It is a paraphrase that misses the mark. It is the short form that leaves off a very important, even essential part of the message. What is telling is that when that phrase is put to the test, it fails. If all are welcome, then white supremacists and their views on the inequality of the races would be welcome. But they are not. They are wrong. If you come into the wedding banquet without repenting of that, wailing and grinding of teeth are sure to follow. If all are welcome, then sexists who posit that the female is inferior to the male, like in many Islamic countries ruled by Sharia Law, that they would be welcome. But that is false and most unwelcome. If you enter the wedding feast without rejecting that error, you will be cast into the outer darkness. If all are welcome, then greedy capitalists who value money over the welfare of their underlings and who oppress the poor would be welcome, and they are most definitely not. This sin cries out to heaven, and the Lord hears the cry of the poor. If all are welcome, then horrible environmental polluters who brazenly desecrate our common home with trash, vile chemicals and sinful laziness in the waste they produce and expel into the world, are to be welcomed too. But they are not. Unless of course, they repent. And that is the point.



Welcome is the wrong word. Welcome implies agreement, acceptance, embrace not only of one's person but of one's ideas. Perhaps that is the problem. People who are well-meaning and good natured have been hood-winked by modernism and have enshrined tolerance as the greatest good. This is the hijacking of Christianity just like the Gnostics of old. The message is close, but subtly and essentially difference. Those who prompted us to start singing "all are welcome" either forgot repentance and conversion were necessary or they purposefully lied in order to destroy. We have to be careful of conspiracy theories, but it is curious that those who are trying to change the settled doctrine of the Church and introduce foreign elements of a worldly and even under-worldly nature are the ones that seem to sing this refrain the loudest. Because they are intent on "welcoming" people, they inadvertently leave a back door open for offensive and vile distortions of the moral and natural order, to say nothing of the complete undoing of the direct biblical dictates. There is a subtle shift from firmly believing in the revealed truths handed down to us from Scripture and Tradition to the perceived motives of a squishy emotivism about feeling good and feeling bad. The reality is that in the end, and even in the beginning, the cross feels bad. Sin oftentimes feels good. If we spend all of our time seeking out what feels good to our senses and indulging in that which placates our emotions we will very quickly slip into something that doesn't resemble the Catholic Faith at all, and then what are we? Humanists? At best. Back at square one for humanity, yes. If the Catholic Faith is the Light and Salt of humanity, we are quickly snuffing it out and diluting it. I believe the "All are welcome" banner is one of the slides by which we tumble headlong into this pit. "Come as you are" and "non-judgmental" buzzwords are like honey drawing in the fly. But they are just as dangerous to us as the honey is to the fly when it sticks to them and drowns them in a sugary demise. People say in reaction, but, "What would Jesus do?" The answer is in the manner in which He treated the woman caught in adultery. "Does no one condemn you?" "No one sir." "Then go and sin no more." Jesus invites her to change, to heal, to step into the light. His mercy is directed towards her repentance and conversion, not staying as she was.

Now, before you throw up your hands in disgust and rail and rant against how intolerant this preacher is, I would like to propose to you a better way to accomplish the noble purpose of loving the sinner without the disastrous consequence of leading people into an inescapable morass of error. I propose that instead of using the phrase, "All are welcome," we use rather the very words of the Scripture presented to us today: "All are invited." This is a truth that we cannot pass up. All are invited. It must be proclaimed on the housetops. All are invited. It must be disseminated in the highways and by-ways. All are invited. To the feminists, the transgendered, the same-sex-attracted, the Marxists and anarchist alike. All are invited. To the white supremacists, sexists, greedy capitalists and horrible polluters alike. All are invited. God desires that all men be saved. He does not desire the death of the sinner, but rather that he be converted and live. "I came that they might have life and life in abundance." This is the saving will of our God. All are invited. He proves this desire by eating and drinking with sinners and tax collectors. All are invited. He reaches out to the down-trodden and rejected of the world. All are invited. He offers them a place at His banquet. "Go out into the highways and the byways and invite whomever you find to the feast!" Come without money, without cost. Eat and drink. "On this mountain the LORD of hosts will provide for all peoples a feast of rich food and choice wines, juicy, rich food and pure, choice wines." All are invited. But this is an invitation and an invitation only. We can either answer the invitation or ignore it at our peril. We can accept the conditions incumbent with it or we can try to impose our own will on it to our demise. This invitation is not a license to simply choose to do whatever we will; that will not be welcomed. To receive an invitation from the Lord should not be occasion for an open presumption that I am where God wants me to be, and therefore I don't need to change. Change we must. He invites us precisely because we are not where we are supposed to be. Furthermore, we must put on the wedding garment in order to attend the wedding banquet. This is the garment given to us at our baptism. We must change into our Christian clothes, or there will be consequences. Saying you are a Christian is not the same thing as acting like a Christian. This is the subtle error communicated by the phrase "all are welcome." Rather, "All are invited, but few are chosen." That is how that phrase ends. Oh, how I want to be in that number, when the Saints go marching in. It is an awesome gift to receive an invitation to that parade. That is the good news. But it is not a forgone conclusion that I will be in that number. That is what is overshadowed by the error of only reading



the short version. I only know that is a possibility and reality by reading the rest of the story. Now I know, and that is half the battle. . . That is why I like the long form of the Gospel.