

We have lost a great deal in these Covid times. People of faith have missed gathering here in church for Mass. We have all been missing the freedom to gather together in other settings apart from the church like parties, social gatherings, eating together with friends at restaurant and in house. We like to share table with people in all kinds of settings, whether it is in our own homes or in restaurants and pubs. We all know that the restrictions on gathering are absolutely necessary, if the virus is to be brought under control. It is a deprivation but a very necessary one. These set of restrictions will pass eventually. We can look forward to gathering again. As people of faith, gathering is at the heart of the way we express our faith. We see the references to gathering in today's readings.

The first reading from the prophet Isaiah depicts a wonderful gathering, which the Lord brings about. It is no ordinary gathering. It is a gathering for all nations at a feast of rich food and fine wines. This gathering is about our life of salvation in heaven with full of joys and celebration. In this gathering there is no sorrow and no division. At this feast, people's deepest hungers and thirsts, their deepest hopes, will all be satisfied. The Lord wants to gather us all at such a banquet of life, where death in all its forms is overcome. It is not a gathering of the pure and perfect. The church is a gathering of what the parable this morning calls 'bad and good, saints and sinners. God created us to be together, and our heavenly destiny is to be together in a way that far surpasses any experience of gathering we may experience in this earthly life. In today's Gospel Jesus compares the kingdom of God to a king's banquet for the wedding feast of his son that was refused by many. An invitation to a royal wedding is a serious matter. In the parable the first invited guests insult their host by refusing the invitation at the last minute even though they had earlier said they would come. Some of those guests not only made lame excuses but maltreated and killed the king's servants. The king had every right to be furious. As a result, the invitation is extended to all kinds of people. The equivalent experience today might be someone who had accepted an invitation to a meal in a friend's house and then, just ten minutes before the meal is due to start, rings up and says he or she will not be able to come after all. The host might have second thoughts about asking that person around again.

We also see God's persistence. God is determined that His Son Jesus, the bridegroom should have a wedding banquet where there are no empty seats. God's banqueting hall for His Son is huge and limitless. God is constantly drawing people to His Son; to share the table of His Son, to be special guests of His Son and to be in close communion with Him. Even when we seem to show little interest or say lame excuses, God will keep searching until He finds people who are interested or until we have a change of mind or heart. There is nothing selective about God's guest list. We are all on God's guest list. God invites all of us to be around His Son Jesus, the bridegroom, to enter into communion with him. This is a great Christian calling. God values us so much that He desperately wants us to be present at His Son's great feast. His invitation needs to be responded to. He wants us all at His table but He would like us to turn up properly dressed, wearing our wedding garment. We should know that we are in the presence of the host, the King and the Lord. Attendance to the wedding banquet also means the expression of honor and loyalty to the king. St. Paul in his letter to Colossians (Col 3:12-14) speaks of what such a garment looks like. He says, 'clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience... forgive each other, just as the Lord has forgiven you... Above all, clothe

yourselves with love'. This is the garment we are to put on every day of our lives, in preparation for that wonderful banquet the Lord has prepared for us. Each day we are invited to taste the joy and the hope of the gospel for ourselves, and to become messengers of that joy and hope to others. The Eucharist is a foretaste of the great wedding banquet of Christ in the kingdom of heaven to which God invites us. So, as we are gathered around the table of the Lord, let us be grateful to God and pray to Him to help us to respond to His invitation to be part of His kingdom with worthy wedding garment. Amen.