

Homily - October 11th, 2020 – 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Have you ever been invited somewhere that you really didn't want to go?

My experience is that there are very few of us comfortable with just saying no to these invitations. We feel we have to offer a plausible explanation as to why we can't attend. Come up with a believable excuse that will spare the inviter's feelings.

This always brings back memories of asking girls out in high school. I am still not sure why Saturday night is such a big night for girls to wash their hair. I remember one girl whose grandmother died 5 times. Regardless, I am sure their heart was in the right place as they probably felt it would be rude to just say no.

You know what is infinitely more rude than saying no? It's not responding at all. That's the first group of people we encounter in the gospel today. I am sure they all had their reasons for not wanting to attend the banquet. We're told that one person had work to be done on his farm; and another had to tend to some pressing matters with his business. Others just couldn't have been less interested, as is indicated by their treatment of the folks who extended the invitation.

This begs the question: why would you not want to attend a royal banquet (a feast fit for a king as my mother used to say)?

We in church world ask ourselves this question constantly. Each week (pre-covid and post-covid), the invitation is there for any and all to attend this banquet. Yet, every week we are dumbfounded that this sacred space is not filled. In fact, not only is it not filled, the numbers are actually declining. How is this possible?

One reason might be the way we market ourselves, if I can use that term. I think we are viewed as an institution that has its place for the special "religious" events in someone's life like baptism, or marriage or a funeral - but other than that, really isn't relevant. I can remember asking a young parent in a baptism prep class to tell me what he thought of the church, and to be brutally honest. He said: "I don't know enough about it to have an opinion". Could we be more irrelevant in this young man's life? We can lay all the blame on this young man for his lack of engagement, or we can take some ownership.

Now when I say "market" ourselves, I want to explain what I mean. I think what we have to offer as a community of believers is a very well kept secret to the people outside these walls. And who exactly is keeping this secret? We Are!

Unfortunately, despite our best intentions, we sometimes don't do a great job of conveying the love that is supposed to define who we are. We can be viewed as judgmental, closed minded, and worst of all; Clickish. I know and you know that's not who we are, but how do we let the world know?

Jesus tells us that: "they will know you belong to me by how you love". So, how do we love? Three things:

we have to be accepting - be respectful of everyone's journey. Everybody is carrying something. We should be in awe of all that someone has to carry instead of in judgment of how they choose to carry it.

we have to be welcoming - be willing to welcome new faces into the fold. Make it a point to get to know them.

"Cheers story" - if you remember the television show "Cheers", then you must remember the theme song which stated, "***You want to be where everybody knows your name***". People want to be where



everyone knows their name. That should be church. I told a group of young people once that if I went somewhere four weeks in a row and no one talked to me, I probably wouldn't go back either.

be genuine - don't try to be something we are not and what we are not is perfect. It's OK to acknowledge that we have room to improve. Who doesn't? People may be more willing to offer their gifts if we are willing to let them see how much they are needed.

We are given a wonderful image in that first reading from Isaiah of just what this banquet we are invited to looks like. Rich food, well-aged wines and peace for our souls. We are told that God will wipe away all our tears and there will be nothing left to fear.

The best part in all this is that we are told that the Lord of hosts will do this for **all** people. Scandalously, everyone is invited.

This reminds me of the story of two Baptists who arrive in heaven and are being given a tour by St. Peter. As they head down this long hallway, St. Peter turns to them and asks them to be very quiet. They are surprised by this and respond, "This is heaven why do we have to be quiet?" St. Peter said to them: "On the other side of this wall are the Catholics; they think they are the only ones here".

What a surprise it will be when we see who we're sitting next to in heaven. Every time I get into a debate or conversation about religion, I

always say that we will have plenty of time to hash this out once we're in heaven.

There is one important caveat to this though. We need to respond to the invitation.

If you are lucky enough to win the lottery, I can tell you this; Atlantic Lottery is not going to call you and tell you that you won. No, you need to claim it.

Similarly, we need to claim for ourselves what God is offering us. It's ours for the taking. And once we claim it, our next step is to give it away so that the banquet hall will be filled with guests from all walks of life, because this is too good to be just our little secret.

I just want to finish by saying that this is Thanksgiving weekend. A time to step back and be thankful for all that we have. Some have much; some not so much. As Saint Paul says in that second reading: "I know what it is to have a little, and I know what it is to have plenty". The secret for all of us is in the old saying: "It's not about having what you want, it's about wanting what you have".

My prayer for all of us is that our lives are always guided by gratitude and not greed, and that we are thankful for not just the things in our lives, but more importantly the people God has put in our lives.

Happy Thanksgiving!

Mark Mahoney