

Homily - October 15, 2023
28th Sunday in Ordinary Time



Another parable and another conundrum. Jesus' technique seems to be that he tells a parable, walks away without explaining it, and leaves people scratching their head for the explanation. Only those interested in growing in their faith bother to chase after him with the request, "Tell us more. We hunger to be fed with the food that's nourishing you. We noticed you praying; teach us how to pray." Others fall away thinking, "If he isn't going to do a miracle, why bother?" He doesn't give you anything until you ask. But once you ask, he opens up the treasure chest and gives you everything inside of it.

This parable seems to be rolling along quite well until the end when the king, who was so desperate to have people come to his son's wedding banquet, does the surprising thing of throwing someone out of the party. He worked so hard to get people in, even ***inviting those not worthy***, and now he's throwing someone out for a trivial reason--for not wearing a wedding robe.

Parables tend to be like that. They have you saying, "I get. I get. I get it. I don't get it." They are blind-sided storytelling. Parables take aim at our presuppositions that we are so sure are correct. The goal of parables, and not just this one, is subversion. They are meant to penetrate to the core of what we unquestionably hold as true and question it. In the realm of parables nothing is safe.

Remember, Jesus doesn't give answers as much as he tells parables and invites us on journeys. The journey he invites us onto is the very journey he is on. It's a journey that passes through struggle, pain and death, to which Peter—more than once in the gospels—says, "God forbid it. I'm not getting on that train and I don't want you, Jesus, to get on it either, so stop talking about how the Son of Man must get to Jerusalem and suffer." But while the journey passes through struggle, pain and even death, it's final destination is always resurrection, eternal life, and joy. It ends with a banquet that never ends. It ends with union with God (that's

why the setting of this parable is a wedding; wedding are about union). It ends with the joy of the resurrection. In his farewell speech the night before Jesus gives his life on the cross he says, “Everything I ever told you was for one purpose and one purpose only--so that **my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete**. So, come on this journey with me, and I promise you it will end with joy.”

But before the journey, there comes the invitation to the journey. All Jesus wants of us is nothing less than what the king wanted from his guests—that we respond to the invitation. You can’t earn an invitation to the wedding banquet. The invitation is a given long before you decide what you want to do with it. It’s all yours. All I want you to do is say, “Yes, I’ll come.”

Five years before I began my studies at seminary, I went on a “vocation discernment” retreat. I remember the retreat leader, Fr. Blair, saying to us, “Don’t ask ‘what is God’s will for my life?’. You might never get the answer to that question, for who of us truly knows God’s will when we barely know ourselves?” “Instead,” he said, ask, ‘What is the most loving response I can make today to the fact that God has loved me so much?’ To that you will find an answer.” And, I did.

God is looking for a response today, right now, right here. Today is the day of salvation. We don’t know how our lives will unfold tomorrow, or next month, or next year. But what is the most loving response we can make today?

Is not the Christian life a response to Christ’s invitation to “follow me”? Is not your presence here, week after week, a conscious or subconscious response to an invitation? Remember, invitations are not earned, but they do require a response.

Here comes the first invitation you ever received in life. Since most of us were babies at the time of this invitation, it was largely subconscious wanting to become conscious someday. You just had the water of baptism poured over you, you were dressed in a white garment, and then came your first invitation:, **you have become a new creation, and have clothed yourself in Christ. See in this white garment the outward sign of your Christian dignity. With your family and friends to help you by word and example, bring that dignity unstained into the everlasting life of heaven.** In other words, you have been clothed in Christ and were meant to share in the everlasting life of heaven, the eternal banquet. Your

baptismal garment is the sign of your Christian dignity. It tells the world who you are and whose you are. Imagine yourself wearing it and never taking it off until you have entered the everlasting life of heaven.

This baptismal garment, this wedding garment, is a sign of your conversion to Christ, a sign of your willingness to respond to Christ's invitation to follow him on the journey. Why? Because he wants the joy that's in him to be in you, and that your joy will be complete.

There seems to be someone who has appeared at the wedding banquet who is not wearing the wedding garment. My interpretation, and it's only my interpretation, is that he is not willing to wear the garment. He's not willing to enter baptism. He's not willing to follow Christ through death and into resurrection. He's not willing to follow the Son of Man into Jerusalem through suffering and death and ultimately into the joy of King's banquet. Although he's managed to get inside the banquet hall, his response is the same as all the so-called worthy who found every reason not to come. He's not interested in the question: what is the most loving response you can make today to the fact that God has loved you so much?

He didn't do anything evil; he just didn't do anything. Apart from his punishment, one of the greatest punishments, meted out in the four gospels, goes to the servant who was given a single talent and did nothing with it. He buried it in the ground. He didn't do anything bad; he just didn't do anything. Not to wear the baptismal garment is to do nothing. What we tell people in the R.C.I.A. process, those seeking to join the Church, is that their life matters. Their life is meant to be given in service. If their life isn't already marked by service before baptism, then it certainly should be after baptism.

I end with a quote from a poet from India, whose last name is Tagore. It reminds me of St. Mother Teresa but also of what each of us is called to. Tagore wrote: ***"I slept and dreamt that life was a joy. I awoke and saw that life was service. I acted and found that service was joy."***

Fr. Phil