

XX Trinity 2023

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

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*Ephesians 5.15-20 St. Matthew 22.1-14*

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What is heaven like? Jesus tells us heaven is like a king who sent out invitations to a wedding feast for his son? Many people were invited...but few were chosen. Who are the many who were invited? And who are the few that are chosen?

We have all received invitations to a wedding, baptism, ordination, birthday celebration or Thanksgiving or Christmas dinner. Invitations usually come with an RSVP. Whoever has invited us hopes we will come. Sometimes there are compelling reasons we can't go...we send our regrets with thanks.

Jesus often uses parables...short stories...to make a point. This morning's Gospel is about how the virtual people who were invited to the virtual king's wedding feast for his son responded to the king's gracious invitation, or more accurately how they didn't respond. Imagine how we would feel if we sent out dinner invitations to our friends and they never bothered to respond.

Those who had been invited to the wedding feast first told the king's servants they didn't want to come. When the king sent more servants to ask them to please come to his son's wedding feast...they ignored him and went about their business. They even killed some of the king's servants. The king was angry and had the murderers killed. The king told his servants the people he invited didn't deserve to come.

There is a twist to the story. The king is determined to have every table at his son's wedding feast filled. Since the invited guests didn't think enough of the invitation to come...the king sent his servants out into the streets and dark alleys and filled his banquet hall with the good, the bad, and the ugly. They were the kind of people no one would want at the dinner table...except the king!

There is another twist to the story. The king notices one man who is not wearing wedding clothes. The king would have provided his guests with wedding clothes...the man in the story showed disrespect for the king by coming to the wedding his work clothes. The king has him thrown outside in the dark...where he will cry and gnash his teeth. Harsh treatment? Did it matter how the man was dressed. Yes, it did!

Jesus tells us the story is about what heaven will be like. The story isn't really about the clothes we will be wearing when we receive God's gracious invitation to the wedding feast for his son, Jesus, in heaven. It's about how we will respond and we do need to take God's gracious invitation seriously.

In the Gospel "many are called" means "many are invited". The invitation to the great wedding feast in heaven goes out to everyone! If the invitation to the wedding feast is sent out to everyone and everyone is invited, what about the "few" that are chosen? Who gets chosen and who does the choosing? Doesn't everyone just get to go to heaven?

The parable of the king's wedding feast for his son is about God choosing us, and it is about our conscious choice to be one of the "chosen". When we RSVP with a "yes" we assume the responsibilities that come along with being mature Christians who take the Invitation seriously. We choose to listen to Paul in his Letter to the Ephesians when he says we need to be careful about how we live. We should make good use of every opportunity God sends our way to be witnesses for Christ. We should let the Holy Spirit fill our lives and sing together in hymns and psalms to God.

In his Letter to the Ephesians, Saint Paul echoes what the prophet Isaiah wrote when he tells us we must be "clothed with righteousness." It's not about "what" we wear; it's about "who" we wear...and that who is Jesus himself. Jesus puts us right with God and we must wear that "rightness" with humility and thanksgiving.

Saint John writes in the Book of Revelation...

*... "The time has come for the wedding of the Lamb (Jesus), and his bride (the Church) has prepared herself for it. She has been given clean shining linen to wear. The linen is the good deeds of God's people. How happy are those who have been invited to the Lamb's wedding feast."*

We have the Invitation to the God's wedding feast for his Son, Jesus, in our hands. It's time to answer "yes"...it's time to choose to be chosen...it's time to put on the right clothes...that God himself has provided.

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