

## II Trinity 2024

### Sermon - Saint Joseph Parish

### Father Craig Looney

I St. John 3.13-24 St. Luke 14.16-24



We just received an invitation to join God at the Great Feast in heaven. Everything is ready and God is waiting for us to RSVP the invitation. What will our answer be?

Father Brendan Byrne is an Australian Jesuit priest and Professor Emeritus of New Testament at the University of Divinity, Melbourne. In his book *The Hospitality of God: A Reading of Luke's Gospel*, Father Byrne states that for Luke, the life and ministry of Jesus was a divine "visitation" to the world, seeking hospitality.

According to Father Byrne, Luke portrays Jesus as The One who comes as visitor and guest and becomes host who offers hospitality to the entire world, especially to the marginalized and disenfranchised. Jesus shows God's extravagant love and hospitality through his parables.

In this morning's Gospel, Jesus is having lunch at a leading religious leader's house on the Sabbath. He has just healed a man with edema. He then watches other guests push each other out of the way to get a seat closer to the host. We can imagine Jesus saying to himself, "What are they thinking?" He then gives a lesson in humility and hospitality.

The Parable of the Great Feast is Jesus' response to something one of the men sitting at the same table said, "How happy are those who will sit down at the feast in the Kingdom of God!" Jesus was never one to pass up an opportunity to teach us about God's extravagant love and hospitality.

The virtual host in the parable put a lot of effort into his great feast. Invitations were sent out and when everything was ready, he sent his personal staff to collect the guests. These were the days before telephones and the Internet. The invitations would have been delivered weeks, even months before the great feast.

Imagine the host's disappointment when his guests made excuses for why they couldn't come: one bought some property and had to go check it out; one bought some oxen and he had to take them for test drive; and one

got married and the newlyweds went on their honeymoon. This was the most important dinner of the year and the three invited guests replied, "No, thank you. We have more important things to do than come to your dinner". We can understand the host's disappointment...and anger!

All of us have been invited to luncheons, Thanksgiving or Christmas dinners, or weddings. We're happy someone thought enough of us to invite us. Their kindness and hospitality shows we have a special relationship with the host, something we would miss out on if we weren't there. Of course, we don't live our lives in a parable. There are legitimate reasons we might not be able to attend. We send a note of thanks with our regrets to the host.

The invited guests in the Parable of the Great Feast did not have good reasons for telling the host at the last minute they weren't coming. The property, the oxen, and the honeymoon suite would have still been there tomorrow. They just didn't think enough of the host to want to attend the dinner.

The parable in today's Gospel is about heaven and us getting ready to go there. God sends out the invitation to come with the expectation we will answer yes! The parable also makes it clear God doesn't think there are any valid reasons for not saying yes, although some people might make that choice. The Parable of the Great Feast is ultimately about God's gracious invitation to join him in heaven...and three invited guests who chose to reject his extravagant love and hospitality.

We can show God we're taking his invitation seriously and are ready to accept his offer. We can start by thanking him for the gift of everlasting life Jesus bought for us on the Cross. We can also try to live the kind of life that is pleasing to him, coming to him when we do sin, asking for his forgiveness and for his help to do better.

Let's take a closer look at the invitation we just received. It does read, "How happy are those who will sit down at the feast in the Kingdom of God." God wants us to be with him in heaven. Now is the time to RSVP...Yes!

