

**Accepting God's Invitation**      Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time/A

October 12, 2014 9:00 AM    Is 25:6-10a; Phil 4:12-14, 19-20; **Mt 22:1-14** (We need to be aware of God's love for us and God's call to renewal. It is easy to remain indifferent to God's call, but in the long run it is disastrous.)

**“Many are called; few are chosen.”**

Today's parable is certainly sobering. On the one hand, it describes the lavish generosity of God inviting all people to the feast, the wedding feast, where the wedding is heaven and earth joined together, God and humanity, in the incarnation of God's only Son to which all are invited to enjoy and participate in. At the same time there is no mincing of words about people's resistance. **God wills only good for people, and yet people resist.**

There is even hostility in the story, which appears also in the life of Christ himself and in the lives of so many innocent victims in our world. This is part of what we live every day, the **sobering fact of a world hostile to God**. Indeed, the crucifixion of Jesus was a hostile act in the mind of the perpetrators aimed at Jesus, whom they thought of just as a troublemaker; but actually it was aimed at God because **Jesus is God in disguise**. If we follow the logic of the sheep and the goats, “Whatever you do to the least of my brothers and sisters, you do to me; whatever you didn't do to the least of my brothers and sisters, you didn't do for me,” then by the same logic the crucifixion or execution or abortion or murder of any innocent person is an act of hostility against Jesus, and through him an act of hostility against God. And that is the world we are living in. **Scriptures leave no doubt that Jesus felt solidarity with all who suffer injustice, and he identifies with them.** That's the whole idea of the sheep and the goats in the judgment of God. Jesus, and Jesus is God, identifies with the victim of injustice.

Now ordinarily we don't associate rage with Jesus or with God as Jesus reveals him. There is some raging in the stories of the Old Testament, but not in the New. But this is an exception because Jesus is using this figure of speech to talk about the **dire consequences of rejecting God, refusing his invitation, going our own way**. And, yes, practically speaking in our world cities and societies cannot long maintain the qualities needed for peace and for prosperity and for thriving if the majority of people are rejecting God. There is no such autonomy possible, whether this rejection is just indifference or outright hostility. Many modern people have grown accustomed to think that we humans are on our own and **society can run its own independent course**. But the present state of the world should suggest that such a belief is seriously mistaken. Oh yes, the world can run its independent course, but what's the result? **What's the consequence? That's what this story is about.**

Now the parable could have just ended there, but Jesus kept going; and there is a reason for that. The king sends out a new rash of servants to gather as many guests as needed to fill the enormous banquet hall. You could call this **the “New Evangelization.”** The first list of guests proved unwilling or unworthy, but that cannot stop the feast. That's the second point of the parable. The feast has to go on. **God's purpose in creation has to be fulfilled somehow.** And there are surprises. In fact, **there are no qualifications for being invited this time.** The first time there was a special list, the chosen people, this time everybody; everyone is included. The bad even are gathered with the good. One's moral past is not relevant.

And yet despite the general amnesty, in spite of the fact that merit plays no role in the selection of guests, **there is a requirement.** After all, **this is a wedding feast. It is celebrating something specific, the coming together of humanity and divinity.** That is why the Church since apostolic times has been called the “bride of Christ.” But this young man without the wedding garment didn’t want to be at a wedding. He does not want to celebrate this coming together, and he is free not to. So **everyone is forced to come to the feast, but we are still free not to participate**—the third point of the parable. So he was cast into the outer darkness where there’s “wailing and grinding of teeth”. And what is the significance of **grinding teeth? It is an expression of self-reproach, of one who realized that he or she has voluntarily thrown away the only possibility that one has for happiness,** indeed a terrible fate, but only one freely chosen.

**So what does this say to us today?** How does this change the way we live? How do we make sure we don’t end up in the outer darkness full of self-loathing for having given up voluntarily the only chance we have for happiness? Well, **we need to be aware of God’s love for us and God’s call to renewal.** Now renewal means being aware even in the very present time, in our daily lives, in our families, and in our workplaces what is going on, how God is trying to bring things together, **how we are being called to this very special life of discipleship and service, how we are being called to live in the Holy Spirit of Christ.** And this is what is called “renewal.” This is what we need. Our Church needs renewal. That’s what Vatican II is all about, **calling the Church to renewal.** But what do we find? **A lot of indifference just like in this parable, a lot of hostility just like in this parable.**

**I as your pastor am very concerned about the renewal of this parish and everyone in it.** I’m rightly proud of those who work for this end and this goal, and there are many. One of the simplest and most powerful methods for renewing our parish is this program called **“Christ Renews His Parish.”** We have a wonderful group of men and women that present these weekends for both men and women. The men’s is coming up November 8<sup>th</sup>, the women’s, the last weekend in January. And I personally hope that every single adult in our parish sometime in life comes to one of these weekends. And if you have not yet been to one, then **I urge you to think about this year: November for the men, January for the women.** As we learn from the gospel, it is easy to remain indifferent to God’s call, but in the long run it is disastrous.