

TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (A-2017)

Today, I would like to say a few words about our holy gospel, and what we have here is a parable, that is, a story with a message. While it's true that Jesus addressed this parable to the chief priests and to elders of the people, His words also have value for us today.

Now before I say any more, I need to set the context for this parable. This parable and the two others that come before it are placed right after the cleansing of the Temple. According to Saint Matthew, that event, the cleansing of the Temple, had come near the end of our Lord's life here on earth, not long before He was arrested and crucified.

So here's what happened. Jesus had gone into the Temple area and had found all sorts of commerce going on. There were people selling animals to be used in the Temple sacrifices, and others were changing money. So, Jesus overturned the tables of the money changers, and then He drove all those who were buying and selling out of the temple. As He did so, He proclaimed, "My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of robbers (Mt 21:13)."

In doing these things, our Lord directly challenged the high priest. All this commerce in the Temple was happening with his permission. Furthermore, the high priest had been getting a cut from the sale of every animal used in the temple sacrifices. So, when Jesus did these things, He not only challenged the authority of the high priest, but He was also costing him money, and that infuriated the high priest.

So, the high priest sent a delegation to question Jesus. It was made up of some of the chief priests and some of the elders of the people. They came seeking evidence against Jesus so that they could charge Him with violating the Jewish laws and have Him arrested. When they arrived, the first thing they said to Jesus was this,

"By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority (Mt 21:23)?"

One final thing to keep in mind here. At this point, many had come to believe Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of the living God (as Saint Peter called Him (Mt 16:15)). Obviously, there were others who did not believe, and that was true for some who had heard about (or even witnessed) the miracles our Lord had performed. Among those who did not believe were most of the Jewish leaders, the high priest and other priestly members of the Sanhedrin.

It was a tense situation, and note here that the chief priests demanded an answer from Jesus in the presence of a large the crowd. These people had gathered around to see what Jesus would do next.

Here is what happened. Jesus responded to their question with a question. He said, "The baptism of John, was it from God or man?" He then said, "Answer that question and then I will tell you where my authority comes from." The chief priests had not expected this. They knew the people believed John was a prophet sent by God. Remember too that Saint John had pointed to Jesus and said, "Behold the lamb of God, behold Him who takes away the sins of the world."

So, while the crowd eagerly waited for their answer, the chief priests went into a huddle. They said among themselves, if we say from God, then Jesus will ask, "Why did you not believe Him?" On the other hand, if we say from man, then the crowds will reject us and our authority. So they said, "We do not know." Then Jesus said, neither will I answer you.

It was then that our Lord went on to tell the three parables I mentioned earlier. These parables were all directed against the unbelief of the chief priests and the elders. They were a direct challenge to the chief priests and, for that matter, to anyone else who rejected Jesus.

Now as I go through the parable in today's gospel, keep in mind all of the people who were around Jesus, the crowds He had been teaching, the chief priests and the elders. Also keep in mind the anger of those who had come to challenge His authority, and even more, how angry they were because Jesus had just cut off this flow of money they were getting, bribes essentially, when He overturned the money tables in the Temple.

So, in the parable today, Jesus began by compared the kingdom of heaven to a wedding banquet. The people in the story all represent and stand for the various people before Jesus. The king is God the Father. The son to be married is Jesus Himself. The invitation sent by the king represents the call to believe and enter into the Church. The first servants who carried the invitations represent Saint John the Baptist. The second set of servants represent the Apostles and missionaries who would come once Jesus returned to His Father.

As to the response of those who were invited. That represented the response of those who stood before Jesus. Some were indifferent; they loved the things of this world more than heaven itself. Others not only refused to come, but they even mistreated or killed the messengers the king had sent. These words in particular were meant for the chief priests and the elders who had decided to put Jesus to death.

The army sent by the king represented the future destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 A.D. However, in another way, it represents the judgement and damnation of those who would reject the Lord and reject His offer of salvation.

There is also this sad statement, "The feast is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy to come." This was a direct reference to those among the Jewish people who refused to believe in Him. Recall too what Saint John said in His gospel, "He came to His own home, and His own people received Him not (Jn 1:11)." Because of that, others were invited to fill the hall.

The people on the highways and byways are all the other peoples of the world. As we know, Jesus had come first to the Jews, the chosen people to whom God had entrusted His revelations and to whom He had sent the prophets. But in this parable, Jesus reveals that all the nations of the world, all the peoples of the world, will be invited to the banquet.

Now when the king arrived, he looked out over the guests, and he saw one who had entered the hall without a wedding garment. He was not properly dressed. Here you need to know that it was the custom of ancient kings to provide those invited to their tables with costly garments. These garments were part of the king's treasures. The guests put them on when they arrived and took them off and returned them to the king's treasury when they departed for home.

So, it would be an insult to the king to come to his banquet, and then refuse to put on the garments he had provided for the feast.

By the way, most women today who attend weddings (including the bride and her bridesmaids) come improperly dressed. Their gowns are very revealing and immodest, almost topless. These women are not beautiful as a bride adorned to meet her husband, but rather they appear as suggestive or seductive. In that sense, they are behaving as pagans and not as decent Christian women. Women who wear clothes like these should be ashamed of themselves. Just because something is in style doesn't mean a Christian woman should wear it. Mothers and grandmothers, need to teach your daughters about this. These comments also go for prom dresses and similar clothing which make our daughters look like hookers rather than decent young women.

Back to the parable, the man who came improperly dressed did so deliberately. He is like someone who knows the will of God and has received all of the graces and all the means to do God's will but does not do it.

Those like him will not be allowed into the kingdom of God. They will not be able to sit at the king's table and enjoy the feast. Instead they will be cast out into the darkness. The darkness here is of course an allusion to hell. Furthermore, they will be unable to return from where they had been sent, and that fact is symbolized by their hands and feet being bound.

There in the darkness, they will wail and grind their teeth. This phrase "grinding of teeth" is an allusion to the fact that sometimes in difficult or stressful situations or in anger, people will clench their teeth. I saw a man once who I thought might be possessed doing this.

Jesus then ends this parable with the words, "Many are invited, but few are chosen." His words were a direct challenge to the Jewish leaders. Our Lord was telling them that they were not going to inherit eternal life. He had presented them with the truth. He had presented them with the Father's invitation, but they continued to say no. I am too busy. I have my farm to take care of. I have my business to run. I do not believe.

So what of us today? How does this parable apply to us? Well, we are those people invited to the wedding banquet. We have all received the Father's invitation to join Him in heaven. Furthermore, God will give us all the grace to get there. Our wedding garments will be provided.

All we have to do is accept the invitation and use the graces provided for us, and if we do so, we can enjoy the feast at God's heavenly table. To put it another way, if we use the Sacraments at their proper times, baptism, confirmation, the Eucharist, matrimony, penance and anointing of the sick, if we listen to the teachings of the Church and put them into practice, when God calls us from this life, we will be ready to join Him and enter into the heavenly banquet. Amen.