

TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Gospel: Matthew 22:1-14

Jesus said to the chief priests and elders: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. Again he sent other slaves, saying, 'Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.' But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them.

The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. Then he said to his slaves, 'The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.' Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests. "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?' And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' For many are called, but few are chosen."

REFLECTION 1: THE WEDDING RECEPTION

I remember back in the early 60s in Avoca, when dances held in Ballycoog Hall saw the boys seated on one side eyeing the girls on the other. It took manly courage to walk over that long journey to the other side. 'Would you like to dance?' opened wide the door of rejection: 'No thank you'. Today's Gospel story explores our fears of rejection. So when the king realised the rejection from those who failed to turn up to his invitation to his son's wedding party, he sent servants to invite anyone to attend the party. This Gospel story is a parable that allows us to see God's side. He sends Jesus to invite the whole world to follow and believe. Yet, many are too busy to come and see. People turn their backs on the loving God who has prepared so much for those who believe in him.

In our parable, sometimes known as The Parable of the Marriage Supper, the king is the figure of God, while the great feast was a popular Jewish image for the joy of the life to come - as we heard from our first reading, 'On this mountain the Lord of hosts will prepare for all people a banquet of rich food and fine wines' (Isa. 25: 6-10). The image of God is that of a generous host who knows how to throw a good party.

The prophets often saw that relationship between God and his people as a marriage. The failure to turn up for the feast and to offer limp excuses was regarded as downright bad manners, but the failure to respond to a royal wedding was much more serious. As Matthew viewed it in the 80s AD, when he scripted his Gospel, he witnessed the fearful consequences of that refusal. The armies sent by the king are the Roman armies that besieged and captured Jerusalem in 70 AD, demolishing the Temple and burning the city. This recalls the rejection of God's messengers by Israel throughout history and the positive response by Gentiles (non-Jews) to the Good News, the invitation going out to those on the highways and byways, to those who never expected an invitation to the kingdom.

The parable reminds us that the invitation of God is to a feast as joyous as a wedding feast. To think of Christianity as a gloomy giving up of everything which brings laughter and sunshine is to mistake its nature. It is a joy to which all are invited and it is this joy they miss if they refuse the invitation. If we refuse the invitation of Christ, someday our greatest pain will lie, not in the things we endure, but in the realisation of the precious things we have missed.

Vatican II, in its decree on the laity, declares: 'Only by the light of faith and by meditation on the word of God can one always and everywhere recognise God in which we live, move and exist - seeking his will in every event - seeing Christ in all persons, whether they be close to us or strangers and make correct

judgments about the true meaning and value of things, both in themselves and in their relations to our final goal.