

## The 28<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time October 11, 2020

There is nothing that the world loves more than a royal wedding. It was that way when Prince Harry married Meghan Markle in 2018. Just as fascinating as all the details of the ceremony were the many celebrities who attended. It seemed that everyone who was anyone was there to witness the event - from George Clooney to Oprah Winfrey. All the beautiful people of the world wanted to be in Saint George's Chapel that day to be part of the historic event.

Considering how much interest people have in royal families, could you imagine anyone ever turning down an invitation to attend a royal wedding? If you were to receive an invitation to a royal wedding, wouldn't you drop whatever you were doing to make sure you would be able to attend? Wouldn't you spare no expense to make sure you were there on time, dressed properly, and with a gift fitting for the occasion?

Like us, those listening to Jesus' parable in today's gospel must have been asking themselves, "Who wouldn't accept an invitation from a king? Why would anyone refuse to go when it is the king himself requesting their presence?" Even if they hated the king, they would have wanted to show respect out of fear that he would hold it against them and punish them. But, the people in the parable not only refuse to show up, they maltreat and even kill the messengers. They act with no respect and no fear of the king's power, and so the king shows them no mercy.

Who is the king if not God himself? And, who is invited to this great banquet if not all of humanity, all of us? We realize that it is our Creator - the maker of heaven and earth who calls each of us to friendship with him. God himself honors us by inviting us to share in his life.

In today's first reading, the prophet Isaiah uses poetic images to describe what this wedding banquet that God has prepared for us is like. It takes place on a mountain which is the place of encounter with God. The richest foods and choicest wines are on the menu, meaning that all our deepest needs and wants will be satisfied. Nothing will be able to spoil this great celebration - not even death. And every tear will be wiped away. On that day, we will experience salvation from whatever could harm us and enjoy intimacy with God Himself.

Knowing that we will enjoy this great feast in its fullness in Heaven, we get a taste of it today in the Eucharist and the Mass. The richest food of all - the Body of Christ - and the choicest wine - His Blood - are given to us so that we can begin to experience in our lives the victory of God over death.

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That is what God is offering to every person – the opportunity to be in communion with Him through the Eucharist and, eventually, to share eternal life with Him in Heaven. Such an invitation should fill us with awe and joy. But, so often, we decline to respond and even refuse to show up. For some mysterious reason throughout all the world, God's invitation to know, love and serve Him goes without a response or receives an outright rejection.

Nonetheless, for a reason which is even more mysterious, God never tires of extending the invitation to us. As many times as we may refuse Him, He turns back to us with another opportunity to fill ourselves with the riches of his banquet. Like the king in the parable, He will have his ballroom filled. One of the great saints of the Church, St Alphonsus Liguori, once wrote that “God pursues us with intense love and devotion as if we were His god”. The greatest example of this is the cross. God did not spare His own Son in his pursuit of us. And so we can be sure that God will not spare anything else to draw us into the life He has prepared for us in heaven.

Not only must we accept God's invitation for ourselves, but we must help God to extend that invitation to others. We are here today because we have said "yes". We have experienced the sumptuous banquet of God's life and love and have come back for seconds. Yet, so many in our world are unaware of the invitation which God has extended to them. They are busy with other concerns which seem more pressing. All the while, they are feeling the emptiness and pangs of a hunger they cannot identify. Their lives lack purpose and meaning, and they don't know what to do about it. But, we have the answer. We know what it is they are longing for because we have tasted God's goodness. For us not to tell them about the peace and joy we have found at the banquet of God's Word and at the table of the Eucharist would be like refusing food to someone who is starving. We must never fail to speak to everyone we meet about the hope and the peace we have discovered by saying "yes" to God's invitation to friendship with him.

In God's vast and infinite love, he has spread a rich banquet before us. For over two thousand years, saints have found inspiration and sinners forgiveness around this table. As we approach Jesus in the Eucharist, we cannot forget those who have failed to respond or who have rejected God's love for some unknown reason. As we pray for ourselves that we may never be separated from Christ, we must also pray for those who have yet to respond that they will say "yes" so that this banquet place may be filled to honor God's Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.