

## TWENTY EIGHTH SUNDAY A/2005

Our God is a God of joy and happiness; the kingdom of heaven is all about gladness and cheerfulness. This happiness God brings about to everybody without making a distinction among peoples and nations. The 1<sup>st</sup> reading compares the joy of the kingdom to a banquet in which all types of foods and delicious wines are offered. The prophet even suggests that there will be no more suffering or death, because God will wipe away the tears from every face.

This message of joy and happiness is what we find in today's parable. As in the 1<sup>st</sup> reading, Jesus compares God's kingdom to a wedding feast to which all are invited. Unfortunately, the invited guests refused to come. The fact that in spite of the refusal, the King sends out servants to find other guests shows the insistence of God that salvation may be brought to humankind at any cost. It shows also that God's bounty will never fail even if as human beings we are rebellious and stubborn in doing his will.

As you can see it, the context of the parable refers to the history of Jewish people and the entry of the pagans into the church. As a matter of fact, in order to save his people, God sent them many prophets to instruct them and to keep them faithful to the Covenant. Many times, Israel ignored not only God's message, but also at times people sent the prophets away and killed some. Finally, even when God sent his own Son, this changed nothing. Hence, the entry of the gentiles and the pagans into the church, which is symbolized here by the people picked up from the main roads and the crossroads.

What is astonishing in this text is the condemnation of one of the guests for not having a wedding garment while all have been picked up from the roads. The point here is that those who accept God's invitation risk failure if they do not accept also its logic, its way of thinking, for their condition then is not different from the condition of those who refused the invitation from the beginning. In this perspective, wedding garment stands for new attitude, new behavior and new way of living according to the precepts of Jesus. We cannot become Christ's followers and keep acting as though nothing has happened in our life. In fact, what the parable wants to tell us is that as Christians we must be aware of our responsibility; if we do not put on the new way of thinking as the "new suit" of the sons of the kingdom, we destroy our own life. It is therefore a pressing invitation to convert.

It is in the same way we have to understand the last verse of the Gospel when Jesus says, "*Many are invited, but few are chosen*". It does not mean that God calls many to him and then chooses just only a few among them. To conform our life to the values of God's kingdom, to observe the commandments and to love our sisters and brothers are the criteria which make us worthy of God's kingdom. In this sense, it is we who make us be chosen by the Lord thanks to our behavior.

In other words, baptism as such is not sufficient; what is required besides is a life according to the baptismal promises. Here Jesus is not speaking of those who will enter paradise and those who will be left out; he only wants to draw our attention to the risk of saying yes in words, but then failing to convert.

From today's readings, we learn a lot about our salvation and the Christian life. Our salvation is a gratuitous act of God who calls each of us where we are standing and how we are there. But this call is demanding; it requires change and conversion. In order to be truly Christ's disciples, we have to conform our life to the principles of the Gospel. The fact that the king sends servants into the streets and crossroads to bring people to the feast, without any preparation, teaches us that God does not distinguish between the good and the bad when he calls; he loves us as we are. The simple consequence to draw from such a fact is that nobody can judge himself or herself unworthy of Christ. We all have a privileged place before the Lord; we count a lot before him. What the Lord needs is just our salvation.

Another thing we learn is that the kingdom of heaven is joy and happiness. We are called to be happy and joyful. We have already started this happiness right now on earth by our adherence to Jesus Christ. Christ is in our midst and this is a motif of joy. However, our happiness will attain its fulfillment only at the end of time, when Christ will wipe every tear from our eyes. In this context, all our present joys are the prefiguration of the eternal rejoicing we will find in the presence of the Lord, when we will see him face to face.

In other words, we have a big promise of eternal joy, but we live in the hope of its fulfillment. Even if we have to go now through conflicts, pain, suffering and death, we have the assurance that the Lord will wipe away all tears from our face. The consequence of such a statement is that any time we bring joy where sadness is, any time we feed the needy, any time we dry tears on the face of those who cry we anticipate God's kingdom and its joy. If we do so, God will give us back a hundredfold. Such an assurance we have in the second reading when St Paul, thanking the Philippians for having provided for his need, says that his God will fully supply whatever they need, in accord with his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. Let us pray in this celebration for the realization of God's kingdom; let us ask God to help us work together for our conversion so that we may deserve the joy he has promised us in his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.



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