

The Rev. Daren J. Zehnle
Annunciation Parish, Shumway, Illinois
12 October 2008

The Twenty-eighth Sunday of the Year (A)

Who is the king in the parable today if not God the Father, and who is the son if not the only begotten Son of the Father? And what is the wedding of the Son if not the Incarnation? Yes, when the Word of God took on our flesh he united the Church to himself, all because of his love for us, and in this way heaven and earth were joined together. Where are we to find this wedding feast if not here, at the celebration of the Holy Mass?

The Lord invites everyone to his banquet, saying, "Behold, I have prepared my banquet ... everything is ready; come to the feast" (Matthew 22:4). We know that "some ignored the invitation and went away, one to his farm, another to his business" (Matthew 22:5). What was so important that kept them from accepting the invitation given them?

Pope Saint Gregory the Great reminds us, "To go to your farm is to involve yourself excessively in earthly toil; to go to your business is to long for the gain brought on by our worldly activity."¹ Are there not many today who refuse the invitation for these same reasons? "One person is concerned with earthly toil, another devoted to the activity of the world:

¹ Pope Saint Gregory the Great, Sermon 38 in *Forty Gospel Homilies*. David Hurst, trans. (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1990), 343. This present homily is largely adapted from this homily.

they take no notice of the Lord's Incarnation, and are unwilling to live in accordance with it."² Why do they not come to the feast? We might also ask, why do we come to the feast?

As in the parable, many today hear the invitation but return to their farms and businesses seeking the things of this world. Some seventy-five percent of Catholics in this country do not attend Sunday Mass, tending as they are to other less important things. We have seen in recent days how worthless such a constant preoccupation with the wealth of this world is. You can spend your entire life amassing its treasures and in a brief moment it can all vanish. When this happens, those who devoted themselves to the things of this world are left with nothing, while our treasure, our pearl of great price (cf. Matthew 13:46), remains.

No doubt we have each accepted the invitation to this feast for a variety of reasons. Some have come who would rather not be here. Some have come out of curiosity, while others have come seeking solace and peace. Others yet have come enthusiastically to thank the Lord for his abundant goodness. But there is one reason that must override all of these: love. Love must be the reason we come to the feast.

Whatever the reason that we have come we know that we must have come dressed in proper attire. The king is coming to his

² *Ibid.*

feast and he will look upon the clothing of our heart and we do not want to be found lacking.

Jesus said, "But when the king came in to meet the guests, he saw a man not dressed in a wedding garment" (Matthew 22:11). What is this wedding garment if not love? Everyone who believes in God and who belongs to his Church has already come to the feast, but not all have come with a wedding garment, not all have come in love.

My friends, if we dress appropriately for an earthly wedding to show our joy for the couple, why do we not properly dress for the wedding banquet of the Lamb? How is it that we do not care to change our clothes to come here where the angels rejoice and we taste heaven? What do we say to the Lord if we do not come dressed in love, the only fitting garment?

Let us consider, briefly, this garment that is love. Just as our own clothing consists of two parts, of an upper piece and a lower piece, so, too, does love consist of two parts, the love of God and the love of neighbor. Whoever wants to wear the wedding garment must always follow this dual command of love.

These are profound things to consider and are not always easy to follow; nevertheless, the command to love remains. Let the one, then, who comes to the wedding feast without a wedding garment be greatly concerned and fear being thrown out when the king comes.

Recall again the words of Jesus, "But when the king came in to meet the guests, he saw a man not wearing a wedding garment." It should not be a surprise that within the Church are both good and bad, for it was so even within the Apostles. Thus it shall be until the Lord comes, when he will separate the good from the bad, the one to eternal life and the other to eternal death.

My friends, we are those who have come to the wedding feast. Have you come to the feast with a wedding garment, dressed in love? Consider carefully whether you hate anyone, whether you are envious of another, whether you seek to harm another person in any way.

The king is entering his feast and, finding one not properly dressed, he becomes angry. He says to him, "My friend, how is it you came in here without a wedding garment" (Matthew 22:12)? He calls him friend at the same time he shows his anger. "It is as if he were saying to him, 'Friend and not a friend; friend because of your faith, not a friend because of your actions.'"³

Even so, the man "was reduced to silence" (Matthew 22:12). Standing before the face of love, before the one who has prepared and given everything, what is there to say in explanation for a refusal to love? There is nothing that can be said; every excuse proves useless.

³ *Ibid*, 350.

We know that we do not always love perfectly, that we do not always love as we should; yet we should not lose the "hope of pardon at the entry of the merciful king."⁴ It is the Lord who "guides me in right paths for his name's sake" and he will not lead us astray if we heed his voice (Psalm 23:3). Let us follow after him with humble courage, learning from him, as did Saint Paul, the way to love "in every circumstance and in all things" (Philippians 4:12).

Here in this Holy Mass, at this altar of the Lord, Christ Jesus will come to us in the Eucharist and extend his invitation to us once again, "everything is ready; come to the feast." Here at this altar, let us "behold our God, to whom we looked to save us" (Isaiah 25:9), that we might "dwell in the house of the LORD for years to come" (Psalm 23:6). Amen.

⁴ *Ibid.*