

28TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Matthew 22:1–14

Loved as We Are, Called to Become More

One of the most beautiful truths of our Catholic faith is also one of the most challenging: God loves us exactly as we are, BUT He loves us far too much to leave us as we are. And I think that is the key to understanding today's rather troubling Gospel. Jesus tells us about a king who invites everyone to his son's wedding banquet. The good, the bad, the respectable, the outcasts. Everyone is welcome. But then the king notices a man without a wedding garment and has him thrown out. And we might wonder: What kind of king does that? Why invite someone in, only to reject him because of what he's wearing? But here's what we need to understand. The wedding garment is not really about clothing. It is about the condition of the human heart. The man was invited to the banquet, BUT he had not embraced what it meant to be there. And there is something about that which speaks directly to the way we live today.

We often hear people say, "This is who I am. Take it or leave it." And there is something deeply human in that desire. We all want to be accepted, to be loved without having to pretend to be someone else. And the wonderful news of Christianity is that God DOES love us, right here, right now, with all our weaknesses, struggles, and imperfections. But God's love is NOT simply an acceptance of who we are. It is an invitation to become who we were created to be. A good parent does not stop loving a child who makes bad decisions. In fact, it is precisely because of that love that the parent sometimes has to say, 'You were made for something better than this.' And isn't that exactly what God says to us? When Jesus encountered the woman caught in adultery, He did not condemn her. He defended her, forgave her, and restored her dignity. But He also said, "Go, and do not sin again." Jesus loved her despite her sins, but He loved her too much to let her remain trapped in them.

That is the heart of the Gospel. And it is why Saint Paul tells us to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ." It is why, at Baptism, we are clothed in a white garment and told that we have become a new creation. We are not simply invited into God's presence. We are invited into a new way of living. But sometimes we want one without the other. We want God's forgiveness without having to forgive others. We want His mercy without admitting our sins. We want His blessings without changing our priorities. We want to follow Jesus, as long as He doesn't ask us to change the things we are determined to keep. And perhaps that is the real meaning of the man without the wedding garment. He wanted to be at the banquet, but on his own terms. Yet love cannot be forced, and communion with God cannot be separated from conversion.

Lastly, notice something extraordinary. When the king approaches the man, he asks: "Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?" Friend. He calls him friend. And yet, the man remains silent. Perhaps that is the saddest part of the entire parable. The king speaks to him, but he has nothing to say. He stands before the one who invited him yet offers no response."

The purpose of our faith is not simply to make us feel comfortable with ourselves. It is to make us more like Christ. More patient. More forgiving. More generous. More truthful. More holy. So perhaps the most important question we can ask ourselves today is not, "Does God love me as I am?" Of course He does. The more important question is: "Do I love God enough to let Him change me?"

Because God does not invite us to His heavenly banquet merely to make us feel welcome. He invites us because He wants us to share His life forever. AND He offers us the grace to become ready for that life. God loves us exactly as we are. But His love is not content to leave us there— ... it calls us to become the saints... we were created to be.