

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time - Matthew 22:1-14

A woman decided that she was going to have a dinner party for a good number of her friends. So, she spent most of the week cleaning, baking, cooking, and preparing the table. And when everyone finally arrived and sat down to eat, she turned to her six-year old daughter and said, “Honey, why don’t you say the blessing?” “Mommy,” she said, “I don’t know what to say.” “Just simply say what you hear Mommy say.” So, the little girl bowed her head and said, “Dear Lord, why on earth did I invite all of these people to dinner?”

Like the woman in the story, you and I can occasionally have regrets about the invitations that we offer. But that is not the case with our God. For our God is a God of invitation. A God who is constantly inviting all people into relationship, inviting all to share in divine life and love.

The parable that we hear today portrays this God of invitation. It also tells us something important about ourselves and our own worthiness to accept God’s call.

The king in the parable is constantly inviting people to come to the wedding banquet of his son. But, no one wants to come. Finally, in frustration he says, “Look, the dinner is ready, but those who were invited were unworthy.” What does it mean in the world of this parable to be “unworthy”? It’s simple. Unworthiness consists in refusing the invitation.

Underlying this parable is a fundamental, theological belief that the invitation of God is supreme. It is really the only thing that matters. Our worthiness, our successes and our failures do not count as much as God’s call.

Therefore, worthiness does not result from all the good things that we have done, but simply from our willingness to say “yes” to the invitation. Unworthiness is not determined by the mistakes and sins that we have committed, but simply our stubbornness in refusing to come to the wedding banquet.

The parable is very clear on this. Look who ends up at the wedding banquet: everyone that the slaves can bring in off the streets, the good and the bad alike. The point here is that our moral condition is secondary, secondary to God’s invitation. The banquet is ready and God wants us to come.

Now, this insight can clarify a number of misperceptions that we can have about the Christian faith. At times we may think that faith is about *us being good*. But it is really about *God being good*.

At times we may think that faith is about *us making the choice to love God*. But faith is really about *God making the choice to love us*.

All the good things that we do, all the wonderful qualities that we have do not make us worthy of that love. All the mistakes we have made, all the sins that we have committed, do not disqualify us from the invitation that God is offering.

God invites us, and worthiness depends upon whether we say “yes” or “no” to that invitation. To say this in another way, *God does not love us because we are good; we are good because God loves us*. We are good because we have said “yes” to God’s invitation and despite any of our successes or shortcomings, we have chosen to come to the feast.

Clearly, once we have said “yes” and accepted the invitation, we try to live a moral life. We try to do good and avoid evil. But, all of us know that our success in that area is rather uneven.

Yet, our success or failure is secondary, secondary to God's invitation. It is God's call that counts.

So, never think that God loves you because you are good, because you come to church, because you give to charity, because you are a good parent or spouse or friend. All of these things are commendable.

But, God's love for you is prior to, and greater than, any of your achievements. None of the good things you do have any claim on God's love. Because, before all of them God freely chose to create you, to save you in Jesus Christ, and to call you to eternal life.

Never believe that God has stopped loving you because you have sinned, because you have failed, because you have cheated or lied, because you have hurt other people, because you are prejudiced or selfish. God's love is prior to, and greater than, any of your sins or failures.

Our God is a God of invitation. God invites us all into relationship, into the divine life. Our worthiness depends only on our willingness to say "yes."

So, let us say "yes." Let us forget all of our successes and failures, all of our virtues and vices. Let us simply say "yes" to God's love. The wedding banquet is prepared. Come to the feast. AMEN.