

GOSPEL

MATTHEW 22:1-14

Jesus said to the chief priests and elders of the people: ‘The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a feast for his son’s wedding. He sent his servants to call those who had been invited, but they would not come. Next he sent some more servants. “Tell those who have been invited,” he said, “that I have my banquet all prepared, my oxen and fattened cattle have been slaughtered, everything is ready. Come to the wedding.” But they were not interested: one went off to his farm, another to his business, and the rest seized his servants, maltreated them and killed them. The king was furious. He dispatched his troops, destroyed those murderers and burnt their town. Then he said to his servants, “The wedding is ready; but as those who were invited proved to be unworthy, go to the crossroads in the town and invite everyone you can find to the wedding.” So these servants went out on to the roads and collected together everyone they could find, bad and good alike; and the wedding hall was filled with guests. When the king came in to look at the guests he noticed one man who was not wearing a wedding garment, and said to him, “How did you get in here, my friend, without a wedding garment?” And the man was silent. Then the king said to the attendants, “Bind him hand and foot and throw him out into the dark, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth.” For many are called, but few are chosen.’

A REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS

In this Sunday’s Gospel, Jesus speaks to us about the response given to the invitation from God — who is represented by a king — to participate in a wedding banquet. The invitation has three characteristics: *freely offered, breadth and universality*. Many people were invited, but something surprising happened: none of the intended guests came to take part in the feast, saying they had other things to do; indeed, some were even indifferent, impertinent, even annoyed. God is

good to us, he freely offers us his friendship, he freely offers us his joy, his salvation; but so often we do not accept his gifts, we place our practical concerns, our interests first. And when the Lord is calling to us, it so often seems to annoy us.

Some of the intended guests went so far as to abuse and kill the servants who delivered the invitation. But despite the lack of response from those called, God’s plan is never interrupted. In facing the rejection of the first invitees, He is not discouraged, He does not cancel the feast, but makes another invitation, expanding it beyond all reasonable limits, and sends his servants into the town squares and the byways to gather anyone they find. These, however, are ordinary, poor, neglected and marginalized people, good and bad alike — even bad people are invited — without distinction. And the hall is filled with “the excluded”. The Gospel, rejected by some, is unexpectedly welcomed in many other hearts.

The goodness of God has no bounds and does not discriminate against anyone. For this reason the banquet of the Lord’s gifts is universal, for everyone. Everyone is given the opportunity to respond to the invitation, to his call; no one has the right to feel privileged or to claim an exclusive right. All of this induces us to break the habit of conveniently placing ourselves at the centre, as did the High Priests and the Pharisees. One must not do this; we must open ourselves to the peripheries, also acknowledging that, at the margins too, even one who is cast aside and scorned by society is the object of God’s generosity. We are all called not to reduce the Kingdom of God to the confines of the “little church” — our “tiny little church” — but to enlarge the Church to the dimensions of the Kingdom of God. However, there is one condition: wedding attire must be worn, that is, charity toward God and neighbour must be shown.

Let us entrust the tragedies and the hopes of so many of our excluded, weak, outcast, scorned brothers and sisters, as well as of those who are persecuted for reasons of faith, to the

intercession of Most Holy Mary, and let us also invoke her protection upon the work of the Synod of Bishops, meeting in the Vatican during these days.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What is the ‘gift of the kingdom’ that God offers? Pope Francis describes it as joy, peace, freedom, friendship with God, salvation. What does the Father’s invitation into the kingdom mean for you?
- In what ways do you place your ‘practical concerns’ ahead of the invitation to participate in being part of God’s kingdom?
- How do you feel about the expansive and inclusiveness of God’s invitation and call to be part of the kingdom? What might it mean for how we act towards others?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (e.g. “Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray”)
3. Move to prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others’ prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps reciting the ‘Glory Be’ or similar prayer.