

## 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 onto 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.’

## HOMILY OF POPE BENEDICT XVI

*9 October 2011, Excerpt*

This Sunday’s liturgy presents a parable to us that speaks of a wedding banquet to which many were invited. The First Reading, from the Book of Isaiah, prepares the ground for this theme, for it speaks about the banquet of God. It is an image — the banquet — often used in the Scriptures to indicate the joy in communion and in the abundance of the Lord’s gifts, and it gives some idea of the celebration of God with humanity as Isaiah describes: “On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of wine on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wine... well refined” (Is 25:6). The Prophet adds that God’s intention is to put an end to sadness and shame; he wants all people to live happily in love of him and in mutual communion. Therefore his plan is to

eliminate death forever, to wipe away the tears from all faces, to take away once and for all the dishonourable condition of his people, as we heard (vv. 7-8). All this awakens deep gratitude and hope: “Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation” (v. 9).

In the Gospel Jesus speaks to us of the answer that is given to the invitation of God — represented by a king — to take part in this marriage feast (cf. Mt 22:1-14). Many guests were invited but something unexpected happens: they refuse to take part in the celebration, they have other things to do; indeed, some of them show contempt for the invitation. God is generous to us, he offers us his friendship, his gifts, his joy, but often we do not welcome his words, we show greater interest in other things and put our own material concerns, our own interests, first. The king’s invitation even meets with hostile and aggressive reactions. Yet this does not impede his generosity. He is not discouraged and sends his servants out to invite many other people. The refusal of those invited first causes the invitation to be extended to everyone, even the poorest, the abandoned and disinherited. The servants gather together those they find and the wedding hall is filled: the king’s goodness knows no bounds and all are given the possibility of answering his call. However, there was one condition in order to attend this wedding feast: that the wedding garment be worn. And, on entering the hall, the king notices that someone has not wished to wear it and for this reason bars him from the banquet.

I would like to reflect for a moment on this point with a question: why did this man accept the king’s invitation, enter the banquet hall, find the door opened to him but not put on the wedding garment? What is this wedding garment? At the Mass of the Lord’s Supper, in Coena Domini, this year I mentioned a beautiful commentary on this parable by St Gregory the Great. He explains that the guest had accepted God’s invitation to take part in his banquet, that in a certain way he had faith which opened the door of the banquet hall to him, but he lacked something essential: the wedding garment, which is charity or love. And St Gregory adds: “Therefore each one of you in the Church who has faith in God has already

*continued over page ►*

taken part in the wedding feast, but cannot claim to wear the wedding garment unless he jealously guards the grace of love” (Homily 38, 9; PL 76, 1287). And this garment is woven symbolically on two looms of wood, one above and one below: love of God and love of neighbour (cf. *ibid.*, 10; PL 76, 1288). We are all invited to be the Lord’s guests, to enter his banquet with faith, but we must put on and take care of the wedding garment: charity, to live in the profound love of God and neighbour.

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/ Homily?



**Head:** The king welcomes everyone to the feast, yet still expects the guests to be clothed for the occasion. What does this reveal about the relationship between God’s invitation and our response?



**Heart:** God’s invitation is generous and freely given, but St Gregory the Great says the “wedding garment” is love. Where is love flourishing in your life, and where might it be missing?



**Hands:** The wedding garment is woven from love of God and love of neighbour. Which of those needs your attention this week, and what might that look like in practice?

## 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 (for example, “Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray”)
3. Offer 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 praying the ‘Glory Be’.