

GOSPEL

Matthew 22:1-10

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.’

HOMILY OF POPE FRANCIS

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The parable we have just heard describes the Kingdom of God as a wedding feast (cf. Mt 22:1-14). The central character is the king’s son, the bridegroom, in whom we can easily see Jesus. The parable makes no mention of the bride, but only of the guests who were invited and expected, and those who wore the wedding garments. We are those guests, because the Lord wants “to celebrate the wedding” with us. The wedding inaugurates a lifelong fellowship, the communion God wants to enjoy with all of us. Our relationship with him, then, has to be more than that of devoted subjects with their king, faithful servants with their master, or dedicated students with their teacher. It is above all the relationship of a beloved bride with her bridegroom. In other words, the Lord wants us, he goes out to seek us and he invites us. For him, it is not enough that we should do our duty and obey his laws. He desires a

true communion of life with us, a relationship based on dialogue, trust and forgiveness.

Such is the Christian life, a love story with God. The Lord freely takes the initiative and no one can claim to be the only one invited. No one has a better seat than anyone else, for all enjoy God’s favour. The Christian life is always born and reborn of this tender, special and privileged love. We can ask ourselves if at least once a day we tell the Lord that we love him; if we remember, among everything else we say, to tell him daily, “Lord, I love you; you are my life”. Because once love is lost, the Christian life becomes empty. It becomes a body without a soul, an impossible ethic, a collection of rules and laws to obey for no good reason. The God of life, however, awaits a response of life. The Lord of love awaits a response of love. Speaking to one of the Churches in the Book of Revelation, God makes an explicit reproach: “You have abandoned your first love” (cf. Rev 2:4). This is the danger – a Christian life that becomes routine, content with “normality”, without drive or enthusiasm, and with a short memory. Instead, let us fan into flame the memory of our first love. We are the beloved, the guests at the wedding, and our life is a gift, because every day is a wonderful opportunity to respond to God’s invitation.

The Gospel, however, warns us that the invitation can be refused. Many of the invited guests said no, because they were caught up in their own affairs. “They made light of it and went off, one to his farm, another to his business” (Mt 22:5). Each was concerned with his own affairs; this is the key to understanding why they refused the invitation. The guests did not think that the wedding feast would be dreary or boring; they simply “made light of it”. They were caught up in their own affairs. They were more interested in having something rather than in risking something, as love demands. This is how love grows cold, not out of malice but out of a preference for what is our own: our security, our self-affirmation, our comfort... We settle into the easy chair of profits, pleasures, or a hobby that brings us some happiness. And we end up aging badly and quickly, because we

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grow old inside. When our hearts do not expand, they become closed in on themselves. When everything depends on me – on what I like, on what serves me best, on what I want – then I become harsh and unbending. I lash out at people for no reason, like the guests in the Gospel, who treated shamefully and ultimately killed (cf. v. 6) those sent to deliver the invitation, simply because they were bothering them.

The Gospel asks us, then, where we stand: with ourselves or with God? Because God is the opposite of selfishness, of self-absorption. The Gospel tells us that, even before constant rejection and indifference on the part of those whom he invites, God does not cancel the wedding feast. He does not give up, but continues to invite. When he hears a “no”, he does not close the door, but broadens the invitation. In the face of wrongs, he responds with an even greater love. When we are hurt by the unfair treatment of others or their rejection, we frequently harbour grudges and resentment. God on the other hand, while hurt by our “no”, tries again; he keeps doing good even for those who do evil. Because this is what love does. Because this is the only way that evil is defeated. Today our God, who never abandons hope, tells us to do what he does, to live in true love, to overcome resignation and the whims of our peevish and lazy selves.

There is one last idea that the Gospel emphasizes: the mandatory garment of the invited guests. It is not enough to respond just once to the invitation, simply to say “yes” and then do nothing else. Day by day, we have to put on the wedding garment, the “habit” of practising love. We cannot say, “Lord, Lord”, without experiencing and putting into practice God’s will (cf. Mt 7:21). We need to put on God’s love and to renew our choice for him daily. The Saints who were canonized today, and especially the many martyrs, point the way. They did not say a fleeting “yes” to love; they said they “yes” with their lives and to the very end. The robe they wore daily was the love of Jesus, that “mad” love that loved us to the end and offered his forgiveness and his robe to those who crucified him. At baptism we received a white robe, the wedding garment for God. Let us ask him, through the intercession of the saints, our brothers and sisters, for the grace to decide daily to put on this garment and to keep it spotless. How can we do this? Above all, by approaching the Lord fearlessly in order to receive his forgiveness. This is the one step that counts, for entering into the wedding hall to celebrate with him the feast of love.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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



Head: What do you think it means for people to get “caught up in their own affairs”? Have you experienced this?



Heart: How do you feel about Pope Francis’ reminder to say to God daily, “Lord, I love you; you are my life?”



Hands: What would it look like, in practice, to daily put on the wedding garment, the “habit” of practising love?

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. 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.’