

TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – OLPH - 2014

Isaiah 25:6-10; Philippians 4:10-14, 19-20; Matthew 22:1-14

At a church conference in the US, people were given **helium-filled balloons** and told to release them at some point in the service when they **felt joy in their hearts**. All through the service worshippers kept releasing balloons. At the end of the service it was discovered that most of them still had the balloons in their hands. If this experiment were repeated in our church today, how many of us would still have our balloons unreleased at the end of Mass? Many of us think of God's house as a place for seriousness, a place to close one's eyes and pray, but not a place of celebration, a place where we can have fun. The **parable of the Great Supper** in today's gospel paints a different picture. The Christian assembly is a gathering of those who are called to the Lord's party. In the Eucharist we say of ourselves, "Happy are those who are called to his supper." The Lord invites us to a supper, a banquet, a feast. Can you imagine a wedding feast in which everyone sits stone-faced, cold and quiet? I understand that it takes seventeen face muscles to smile but forty-three to frown. Laughter is the only tranquilizer yet developed that has no side effects. Our expression is the most important garment we wear. Yet, how many of us know fellow-Christians who never smile?

The parable shows us **three possible kinds of guests**. There are the absentee guests who initially accepted the invitation, but when the time came to honour the invitation they drew back. There are the guests without wedding garments who attend the feast but do not take the trouble to prepare adequately for it, as the occasion deserves. And then there are the guests with wedding garments who make the necessary preparation to present themselves fit for the banquet of the King.

The scary thing about the absentee guests is that they are not sinners. They were not engaged in sinful activity. One went to his farm, another to his business. These are gainful and noble employments. Sometimes what keep us away from the joy of the kingdom is not sin but **preoccupation with the necessities of life**. To be serious with your job is a good thing, but when your job keeps you away from attending the Lord's Supper, then it becomes an obstacle that hinders you from experiencing the joy of the Lord in your life. There is a saying that the good is the enemy of the best. If only those absentee guests knew what they were missing by not attending the feast! It used to be that people attended church service to fulfill a "Sunday obligation," otherwise it would be counted against them as sin. This kind of fear no longer motivates young people today. More people would probably come to church if they knew they were missing out on the fun of celebrating and feasting with the Christian community.

On the **guest without the wedding garment**, to speculate on whether he had enough time to go home and put on his wedding garment is beside the point of the parable. The point of the parable is: if you must go the dance, you must wear your dancing shoes. If you must go to a wedding, you must wear your wedding garment. By not wearing a wedding garment, he was physically in the party, but his mind and spirit were not there. He was in the feast but he was not in the mood for feasting. Jesus hates this kind of hypocritical attitude. In fact, it is better not to attend at all than to be there and yet not there. The invitation is to all, the party is free for all, yet anyone who decides to attend has a responsibility to present himself or herself fit for the king's company. The kingdom of God is freely offered to us. Those of us on the way to the kingdom must spare no effort in acquiring the moral and spiritual character that is consonant with life in the kingdom.

Finally there are the **guests who attend the wedding feast**, taking care to appear in the proper wedding garment. They are the only ones who have fun and enjoy the party. They are the models whose example we should follow. Today's gospel sends a message to those who are keeping away from the Lord's Supper that they are missing out on the joy of life. To those of us who have accepted the invitation to come in, this parable warns us not to take God's grace for granted but to clean ourselves up and become the most beautiful person that we can be in God's sight. The message is the same as we have in Colossians 3:14: "**Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.**"

So, my friends, **smile often**, because when you smile you let the world know that you belong to Christ who came to show us the way to the Father. Let people sense that Jesus does make a serious difference in your life. Worship God on Sunday and smile with Him throughout the week. The authentic way of finding joy is by focusing on the three letters of the word: **J: Jesus first. O: others second. Y: yourself last.** (Unknown)

Become a pro choicer of a different kind --- Choose to save life rather than destroy it. Choose to forgive rather than curse. Choose to smile rather than frown. Blessed are the joy makers.

On this Thanksgiving weekend **enjoy the many blessings you have received.** Celebrate with family and friends and remember those who have less, especially the hungry and homeless in our city. Share with them and show your joy to the world. Happy Thanksgiving!