

## **Twenty Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

There is an amusing but rather sad scene early in the film Victoria and Abdul. A totally board Queen Victoria scoffs down her food at a royal banquet. As soon as she completes each course the plates of all the other guests are taken from them even if they have not finished eating what was on them. There is very little conversation. It is the antithesis of what a meal should be.

Why do you and I invite people to share a meal with us? I'm sure it is not because we hope that they will bring a nice bottle of wine with them. I think it is more likely that we invite others to share a meal with us because we want to deepen our relationship with them. When we sit around the table we share something of ourselves. We listen to each other's stories. We value and affirm one another.

It is not surprising then that the images of meals and banquets are used in the Scriptures to speak of God's loving relationship with us. We heard the Prophet Isaiah speaking of the beautiful banquet that God will prepare for the people he loves. We often hear this reading at a Funeral Mass. It speaks so easily of what lies ahead for us when we are called home. All of us are invited to this "banquet of rich food, a banquet of fine wines, of food rich and juicy, of fine strained wines." When we sit at the table of the Lord God brings out the very best for us.

In the Book of Proverbs Lady Wisdom invites all to share her banquet. In chapter 9 Lady Wisdom readies her banquet and issues invitations, "She has slaughtered her beasts, she has mixed her wine, she has set her table. She has sent out her maids to call from the highest places in town." It is at her banquet that wisdom can be shared. It is a beautiful image that can describe what happens every time we share a meal with others: wisdom can be shared.

In our Gospel today, the kingdom of heaven is compared to a king who gave a feast for his son's wedding. But the invitations to that feast are rejected. When we are looking for the meaning of the allegory we need remember to whom this story is being told. Jesus tells the story to the Jewish religious leaders of his time. But it is the Christian communities of the early Church who are hearing the story as we have it. They would see that the first invitations would have gone out from God the king, to the people of Israel through the prophets. In the main the prophets were rejected. Jesus came to offer another invitation to God's chosen people; but again many people rejected that invitation. Almost all of those in leadership rejected Jesus and the invitation he brought from God.

When the king in the story wages war and destroys the city, the early Christian communities would have linked that with the destruction of Jerusalem and seen it as a punishment by God for the way that the religious leaders treated Jesus. Now we would be very slow to put that interpretation on what happened to the people of Israel in 70 AD. God doesn't go around punishing people for their sins. He doesn't have to. Sin of itself has its own rewards.

Matthew makes the point that the messengers went out to the cross roads to find whoever they could to come to the wedding. The cross roads were right out on the edge of the city and so by implication it was those on the margins who were now being called into the feast. We are told that they were the bad and good alike.

How does that make us feel? Does it say something about what our church is meant to look like? Does it say something about how welcoming we are called to be of others in our community who may not normally feel at home here? I think it challenges us all to make sure that we do not stand in the way of others hearing and accepting the invitation that Jesus offers to all people to come to know him and become his disciples. Those of us who feel we do know him are meant to be welcoming messengers of his invitation.

The bit about the wedding garment does not speak about whether we were ready to come or not, but speaks rather about what happens after we have accepted the invitation. It is not enough just to accept the invitation. We need to be ready to undergo a conversion, a change of heart, a change in the way that we live that is in tune with the invitation that we have received and accepted. And we have to keep changing all of our lives. The wedding garment could be seen as the good things that we do, the things we do in love, because of our union with Jesus. The wedding garment is that outward showing of what has happened within us because we have been gifted with a share in the life and love of Christ.

That is why Jesus can say that many are called but few are chosen. It is a Semitic way of speaking that comes down to us even in the new translation of the words of consecration where many means all. All are called to the banquet of the kingdom, but few, not everyone, are chosen or destined to enter it. God requires that we play our part to allow God to do for us what he so much desires. Every day of our lives we need to accept again the invitation to the wedding banquet. Every day we need to choose to live the life of Jesus that has been offered to us.