

Homily: 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time 2020

If you're feeling hungry, the first reading probably enticed your taste buds today, with its promise of "foods rich and juicy" and "fine strained wines". It describes a very lavish banquet taking place on a mountain top. It's an image of heaven – a great feast in which God Himself is our host. And more is promised: on this mountain, Isaiah tells us, the Lord of Hosts will remove our shame and our mourning; He will wipe away the tears from every cheek; on this mountain, He will destroy death for ever.

It sounds like a prophecy of heaven – and indeed, it is – but in a sense, this prophecy has already been fulfilled. "On this mountain, the Lord will destroy death for ever." The mountain is Calvary, where – by His crucifixion – the Lord Jesus destroyed death for ever. When Jesus died on the cross He confronted death, and death was defeated. Now He lives for ever, and He offers us that same life. A place at the heavenly banquet can be ours, too.

The night before He died, Jesus was already host at a banquet set for His disciples – a Passover feast, certainly, but also more than that. At that meal, that Last Supper, Jesus gave His disciples His Body and Blood, the gift of the Eucharist. His Body, soon to be given for us on the cross, was first given to us in this sacrament. Each and every time we celebrate Mass, we celebrate this same feast, and we receive this same gift. So this Mass – every Mass – points us back to the life-giving death and resurrection of Jesus and the Last Supper He celebrated with them; but it also points us forward, to the heavenly banquet at which Jesus will again be our host.

Just before Holy Communion, we hear at every Mass some words from the Book of Revelation: "Blessed are those called to the Supper of the Lamb". Revelation describes how these words are spoken at the heavenly banquet, which is a marriage feast between Jesus, the Lamb of God, and His Bride, the Church. This is our ultimate goal: to be united in perfect love with the Lord – this is where genuine, lasting happiness can be found.

In the end, a wedding is a celebration of love. Two lives are sealed as one; they find joy in this union, which cannot be broken – God's love for us is eternal. Our union with Him will be perfect. That's why heaven is perfect joy – because it is perfect, loving union with the God who is love.

But it's not just a gift for the future! Just as, at Mass, we get a foretaste of the heavenly banquet, so too, we can already have a union with God, even if it won't be perfect in this life. That union comes by approaching God in prayer and in the sacraments. Yet, so often – a bit like those in the Gospel who were invited but too busy with their work or business – we find that other things come before our time with God. It's as though we lose sight of what He offers – the joy He wants to share is squeezed out by our day-to-day concerns.

So the parable in today's Gospel contains a warning for us: listen for the Lord's invitation to come to Him, to rejoice with Him, to be united with Him – and accept this invitation! Don't miss life's opportunities to grow in union with the Lord. And there is another warning in this

story. At the end, there is the strange and disturbing mention of a man who gets in without a wedding garment, and so is ejected from the joyful scene. The Fathers of the Church suggest several possible meanings. St Gregory says that the man represents someone who has faith in the Church, but lacks charity – he does not have love. We might think of St Paul, who compares various virtues to clothing we wear, and says, “Over all these things, put on love.” Love, charity – this is perhaps the wedding garment that was missing. St Augustine implies that it represents humility; St Hilary that it represents the grace of the Holy Spirit. Other writers say it represents the grace of baptism and the other sacraments. Whatever the answer, the man is not correctly dressed. But he is not evicted immediately. The King asks Him: “How did you get in here, my friend, without a wedding garment?” Perhaps he is seeking an explanation, or maybe simply an apology, a sign of repentance; it’s only when the man remains silent that he is thrown out.

You and I are invited. We are invited by the King – God – who gives a great feast, a heavenly banquet, for the marriage of His Son, Jesus. Who in their right mind would turn this down? Let’s try to accept every invitation to come to God, every little prompt and nudge that He gives us to move closer to Him; every opportunity in which He invites us to grow in love. Let’s receive as well as we can the grace of the sacraments and the grace of prayer. If we do all these things, we accept His invitation. With each moment lived for the Lord, our wedding garment is being stitched for eternal life.

Fr Andrew

