

28th Sunday A (Matt 22:1-14)

“The kingdom of heaven may be likened to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son.” Since I have officiated at a lot of marriages, I’ve been to a few wedding feasts and I’m sure you have as well. They are usually wonderful celebrations that many guests enjoy. One of the big differences between Jesus and the priests and elders of Israel was that he enjoyed life, even celebrations, more than they did. Jesus was happier than they were. Happiness isn’t the ultimate test of character, but everything else being equal, it certainly counts for something. Goodness that isn’t radiant has something wrong with it. Pessimism and gloominess are not exactly Christian characteristics. The theological virtue of hope is indeed a Christian characteristic.

Our Gospel parable tells of a festive event, it was fun; it was something to be celebrated. The elders of Israel thought of religion as a duty to be done, an obligation to be met. They were like the people in the story who refused to attend the royal banquet. They weren’t bad people, just busy, pre-occupied, people. More important matters demanded their attention. One of them had a farm to tend; another had a business to manage. One might say, they were workaholics. So they ignored the king’s invitation and went their way. There was no time in their schedules or their hearts for celebration.

I am reminded of one of my favorite sayings of the English Catholic poet, Hilaire Belloc: “Wherever the Catholic sun doth shine, there you will find laughter and good red wine, at least I’ve always found it so, benedicamus Domino.” That tells me something about hope, celebration, good humor, and of course, gratitude, all essential to a balanced Catholic life.

When I prepare engaged couples for marriage, my interest in marriage, families, relationships, and how they succeed has grown. This awareness has been heightened by my special ministry with divorced people. Being married and building a home are not unlike tending a farm or running a business, not unlike the demands on our absent guests in our story. A large part is just hard work, and some people never get beyond that level of the relationship. Home life is often a duty to be done and often not enjoyed.

Many couples, on the other hand, manage to experience their marriage on a more joyful level. They don’t escape the hard work or boring routine. Sometimes they put on their party clothes and turn their home into a real banquet hall. They don’t allow their marriage to sink into the level of a burdensome obligation. The home is the place where you are best known and yet most loved, the place where you can be yourself without fear of rejection. It can be a place of great celebration where children are nurtured and loved.

Jesus compared the kingdom of God, that kingdom of peace and justice and love, to a wedding feast given by a king with many invited guests. Some ignored the invitation; others came and joined in the celebration. All of life is like that. To some it is a duty to be done, to others a privilege to be enjoyed. Often circumstances affect our ability to enjoy; sometimes it is just a matter of attitude.

St. Paul in our second reading speaks to us of coping under every circumstance, how to eat well and how to go hungry, to be well provided for or to do without. Paul was in prison when he wrote this, yet he kept a positive attitude toward life. His strength and source of a hopeful attitude was in Jesus Christ. In our personal relationship with Jesus Christ lies our strength as well. And so in the Eucharist we give thanks.

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