

Today is the 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time.

In the Old Testament and the Gospel, we hear mention of banquets. The prophet Isaiah describes “*juicy, rich food and pure, choice wines.*” Isaiah is prophesying about the coming messianic banquet - the feast to end all feasts ... at the end of time ... served up by God ... for His holy people. This imagery would have been familiar to all of Jesus’ listeners eight centuries later.

Yet when Jesus tells the story, He gives way more details ... a Father, who was a King ... throws a banquet for His Son, who was getting married. But when he sends out invitations ... the story gets complicated. The details that Our Lord adds to the familiar imagery of Isaiah are meant an allegory of the Church. God is Father - the Son is Jesus - and the Bride is His Church.

And then there are the invited guests at the beginning of the story, and the silent man at the end.

The invited guests are those who would reject the message of the Gospel outright ... they don’t need or want a Church, nor do they care to hear about Jesus Christ. Not only did the invited guests ignore the first invitation, but in the end they become violent in their opposition to it ... attacking and killing the messengers.

I would not expect that anyone here has rejected the Gospel ... while we may have our doubts at times, we can rely on the infused gift of Faith ... the supernatural virtue which we all received at Baptism ... and which is strengthened by the other Sacraments we receive - most especially the Eucharist.

But the silent man at the end of the story. What is up with him?

There are multiple interpretations of what he represents. The most ancient sources agree that what the man lacked - the garment that was freely given to all guests, but for some reason he had taken off - is Charity ... in Latin, *Caritas* ... and in most modern translations: Love.

Certainly you may have heard at one point or another that in Greek - the language of the New Testament - there are three ‘types’ of love ... the love for a friend ... the love for a spouse ... and the highest form of love

... which is the love that is expressed in a total gift of self. This love is associated with the supernatural virtue of Love. This is Divine Love ... which we lose through sin ... but which is given ... restored ... and strengthened ... in the Sacraments.

And so, the silent man - who is bound hand and foot ... cast into the outer darkness ... with wailing and grinding of teeth - This man has ... according to the oldest Christian sources ... failed to receive and failed to act upon God's free gift ... the gift of Divine Love ... neither accepting it ... nor acting on it.

It is this silent man ... this character in today's Gospel story who should scare us. He was already inside. He had been given the invitation and already had accepted it. Yet he had missed the boat ... ignoring God's gift of love ... the greatest gift of God - and had failed to surrender himself to God's Love.

Breaking this down in the Second Reading, St. Paul could be summarized as: no matter what our circumstances, we "*can do all things in [Christ] who strengthens*" us. And that "*God will fully supply whatever [we] need, in accord with his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.*" But if our strength comes from any other source - jealousy, anger, revenge, manipulation - then we are on the slippery slope to the "*outer darkness.*" Saint Therese of Lisieux, whose feast day was 10 days ago, said it as:

*Everything is a grace, everything is the direct effect of our father's love — difficulties, contradictions, humiliations, all the soul's miseries, ... burdens, ... needs — everything, because through them, [we] learn[ ] humility, realize[ ] [our] weakness — Everything is a grace because everything is God's gift. Whatever be the character of life or its unexpected events — to the heart that loves, all is well.*

As we approach this altar to receive the Sacred Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ, let us pray for an openness to God's grace. May we rest in His power, allowing God's grace to motivate everything that we do, so that we might receive His transforming Love into our hearts - and become, truly, His daughters and sons in Christ Jesus, the Lord.