

The term “wet blanket” comes from the practice in fire-fighting of using a water-soaked blanket to smother ... or put out ... small fires. Sometime in the early 1800s, it began to be applied to a person who takes the joy out of a situation or activity ... in effect, smothering the joy with their pessimism or negativity.

In today’s Gospel, the scribes and Pharisees confront Jesus about his disciples who neither fasted, nor spent long hours droning on in prayer. In comparing His followers to a wedding feast, Jesus is letting us in on the fact that His company must have been a joyful, maybe even raucous, group. And the Pharisees and scribes are trying to smother that joy.

I would imagine we’ve all experienced, or if not experienced - seen ... when someone confronts another person ... asking them a question ... usually in the form: “*Why can’t you be more like ... so-and-so?*”

Such wet-blankets are usually looking to smother some aspect of the other’s personality that they don’t like. Manipulation of other people takes place every day, and in Jesus’ time, the scribes and Pharisees were the ultimate control-freaks ... sucking the joy and the life out of the people who looked-up to them.

Religion is a great place for wet-blankets. We can be manipulated to focus on ourselves, not others ... look at our sins, not our redemption ... and pressured to conform to arbitrary whims of people who have little or no connection to God ... or His love, His mercy, or His peace.

Jesus’ answer to the religious wet blankets of His time is to point out that He didn’t come to be like the other teachers. If Jesus tried to cram the infinite joy of the Gospel and its message of redemption into the narrow, stiff, and unyielding wine-skins of what the Pharisees and scribes considered religion ... well, it would get pretty wet and messy.

Joy is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The early Christian community revealed the joy of knowing Jesus Christ and living the Gospel ... something we might miss in our own time surrounded by denominations and our own scholars and experts.

Today’s first reading from Colossians gives us an example of that early-Church joy in the form of a hymn. Sort of like singing the Creed in the old days: “*Credo in unum Deum ...*” for those of us who remember the tune. :-)

As we approach this altar to receive the Sacred Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ ... let us pray for the spiritual gift of Joy. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to help us recognize the wet-blankets we may carry around with us ... and cast them off ... so that we might become aflame with the Joy of the Holy Spirit ... the Joy experienced in the early Church ... the Joy that comes from our relationship with God through Jesus Christ.