

TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY [A]

Isaiah 25:6-10; Philippians 4:12-14, 19-20; Matthew 22:1-14

Quite frankly, this has been a tough and terrible week.

In a way it began weeks ago with precipitous drops in the stock market. And the breathtakingly volatile collapse this past week [the single worst week in the 112 year history of the DJIA, down 22% in the past 8 trading days] has filled many people with great anxiety.

Then we make our way to church this morning and hear a Gospel like the one we just heard. Is there good news to be found anywhere?

On first hearing, the Gospel is tough and no non-sense. Jesus speaks about wide spread destruction, murderers and cities burned. Good news? Are you kidding me?

Well, for those people who choose to ignore or reject God's invitation on thing is for sure: it will be tough and terrible. To ignore or reject God's call for conversion is so terrible that Jesus explains it merits eternal punishment.

However, the heart of Jesus' tough and terrible parable is all about how intensely God the Father desires the salvation of all people. In Jesus' parable the banquet *is* the Kingdom of Heaven and the king is God the Father.

What are the two causes of the Israelites rejection of God's love call?
According to Jesus, the two causes are indifference *and* hostility.

Indifference: some people who are invited by God care nothing fro the grace He offers them. It is as though they say "we have better things to do" and "our earthly business is much more pressing".

Hostility: other people invited by God say no to God angrily. Arrogance and pride leads them to bark, "leave me alone" and "don't you know I am much too important to be bothered."

Now God's initial invitation is made to the House of Israel, the Jewish People. In salvation history, God address Himself first to the Israelites and, then, to the Gentiles.

And lest we miss the point, the Gentiles – us – also need to respond faithfully to the call we have received. And if we do not accept the invitation we too will suffer the same condemnation and terrible ending.

What are we to make of the wedding garment?

According to St. Gregory the Great (d. 604), “the marriage is the wedding of Christ and His Church, and the garment is the virtue of charity: a person who goes into the feast without a wedding garment is someone who believes in the Church but does not have charity” (*In Evangelia homiliae*, 36).

The wedding garment signifies the proper disposition that a person needs for entering the Kingdom of Heaven. Listen closely to Jesus’ words: it is not enough just to show up. Even though the person may belong to the Church, if the person does not have the right disposition, that person will be condemned on the day of God’s Final Judgment.

Jesus makes the same point time and again in these tough and terrible parables: it is not enough to look the part, we have to live it! However imperfectly, we have to seek to live according to God’s ways more and our ways less.

Kindly allow me to share one final point about Jesus’ tough and terrible parable. These stark words of Jesus in no way conflict with God’s will that all people should be saved (1 Tim 2:4). In his love for all people, Christ patiently seeks the conversion of every single soul, going so far as to die on the cross.

However, God in his infinite wisdom respects our freedom: we are free to say “yes” to God and to say “no” to God.

We can accept His grace and we can reject His grace.

We can seek God and we can be indifferent and hostile toward God.

We are free. We are not puppets on a string. God is not a puppeteer.

God gives us the freedom to choose, to decide, to set our own path.

God’s invitation is given to us all to come to His great banquet, to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. The invitation is not given as some ticket to be taken at the door. No! God’s invitation only can be received by those whose disposition is proper. Jesus is crystal clear: those people – and only those people - who grow in the virtue of charity are the ones who not only get through the door but they get a place at the table.

Both faith and works matter. They are two sides of the same coin.

What are you going to do? Where are you going? What do you choose?

