

## 28<sup>th</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME—CYCLE A

I don't know about you, but my life is driven by my calendar. If I don't put something in my calendar, it doesn't happen.

From time to time, we all have received an invitation to a wedding, a reception, a birthday party with those four letters at the bottom: R.S.V.P. They are an abbreviation of a French phrase that asks us to please respond. Even if we can't attend the event, isn't it nice to be invited?

Today's parable of the wedding feast is a wonderful and troubling story. It is wonderful because our Lord speaks of the great banquet of heaven. But it is troubling because within this story of a great feast and celebration are scenes of murder, revenge and even brutality.

Although we might be tempted to sit down in the troubling parts of the story, let's not go there. Why? Because the great and glorious banquet glimpsed by Isaiah, celebrated within Scripture, and promised by our Lord, is much too inviting to go anywhere else.

First, and yes, above all else, God invites us to a sumptuous, extravagant, lavish feast. No matter where your mind may wander in Matthew's parable, refuse to stray from the invitation to this banquet. God has delivered an engraved, elegant invitation to your mailbox asking you to come to the feast God gives in Jesus Christ. Your presence is wanted, even required, at this celebration. All we need to do is R.S.V.P.

How good and satisfying it is, at anytime, to know that we are wanted. God spares no expense to host a feast where there is a place setting with your name on it.

The invitation given, however, offers us a choice. Of all the gifts God gives us, the one that ranks highest on the list is this radical gift of choice. God spares no expense in printing invitations, preparing the finest of foods, and creating a hall replete with every imaginable appointment. But all of these gifts from God pale in significance to the gift of choice—we have to say “Yes” or “No” to God's invitation.

God so loves you and me that God never manipulates us or shames us into doing what God wants us to do. Weighed in the scale of God's being,

all of God's gifts of life, health, happiness, and grace never negate or overwhelm God's gift of choice. The prophet's vision of this great banquet describes in detail the feast that God brings. God gives generously, all God asks is that we respond freely, joyfully, gratefully.

But, we can say "No." God longs for us to say "Yes" and does all God can do to make saying "Yes" easy, but we can – and often do – say "No."

So where does this leave us? Let me offer two simple suggestions to keep in mind when we open our life's mailbox and find an engraved invitation from God to a wedding banquet. Let's say "Yes" first and then shape our life around this "Yes." Often we turn God down because our life's schedules are already booked with other things.

The second simple suggestion is to live everyday prepared for a feast. The poor soul in the parable who was tossed out because he did not have a wedding garment on could be a snapshot of all of us. We are tempted to have pity on the guy because he was dragged off the street to attend this banquet with no time to take a shower, clean up, and put on his Sunday best.

And that's the whole point, isn't it? He should have known that in *this* king's realm, banquets are daily things and anyone, at any time, can get in on the party. What if we lived "banquet-ready" every day we lived? What if we decided today to put R.S.V.P. on every page of our calendar? What if living "banquet-ready" was how God intends for us to live?

Here is the good and nourishing gift from this wonderfully troubling parable. The feast is ready, the invitations are out, the heralds are calling us to come to the table and sit at places reserved for us. The gift God gives in Jesus Christ is so like this banquet invitation. All we are asked to do is R.S.V.P. and then attend, dressed in our best expectation, like people who have come to expect banquets as daily meals. Such is the King whose Son we serve. Such is the God who gives extravagant parties for people like you and me. Amen.

