

Tuesday: Ordinary 31-A
National Liturgy Conference

Canadian Martyrs Church

7 November 2017

Dear brother bishops, priests and deacons, sisters, and dear friends in
Our Lord Jesus Christ:

Introduction

It's certainly auspicious that the Conference is drawing to a close with a two-fold banquet: the Eucharist which we are celebrating now, and the celebratory banquet to follow. This is not only a pleasure but also a tradition that has its roots in apostolic times. It's good to be an apostolic Church.

A Look at the Gospel

Today's parable of the guests invited to the feast, as recounted by the Evangelist Luke, can be read at several levels, each of which sheds light on our discipleship.

Original Context

The first level of meaning enables us to read the parable as a lesson of what is fundamental to discipleship: to accept the Lord's invitation to follow him regardless of the cost. God's call inevitably relatives all other claims on us. The parable shows how entanglement with persons and preoccupations can, in effect, be a refusal of a divine invitation.

Many of those who were on the guest list did not accept the master's invitation, and instead offered excuses. Admittedly, at first

glance, they appear to be some pretty good ones: pressing business deals and family responsibilities. In themselves, perhaps, they weren't flimsy, since each excuse had a certain plausibility. But, with their misplaced priorities, the refusers all show a certain contempt, and this enrages the would-be host.

Those long invited allowed the affairs of life to keep them from accepting the host's gracious invitation, convinced that they had better things to do. Indeed, so preoccupied were they with their own business that they scorned the owner of the house, caring nothing for the grace offered them.

We are those busy individuals, whenever we fail to grasp the urgency of the call that embodies the demands of the Kingdom. It is not out of place to see in the refusals of the businessman and recent bridegroom a kind of mirror of our own personal stance before the Lord – at least on some occasions. At different times in life we all receive interior, hidden and sometimes obscure invitations to embrace Christ in the self-emptying of his Cross, but we then refuse them in favour of doing a thousand other things. Have we not all said at one time or another to the Lord, “may I be excused for the time being”? In such cases we are indulging what we regard as our own pressing responsibilities, neglecting the Lord's insistence on “the one thing necessary” and the “better part” (cf. Lk 10:42). Indeed, whenever we

refuse an invitation of the Lord, we might be close to gaining the things of this world but are on the brink of losing our very soul.

Lest, however, we be discouraged by our feeble excuses, allow me to cite an observation on this passage from Karl Rahner:

There are a thousand excuses which have been used by us poor sinners, cowardly and complacent earthlings. In this form or that, on this occasion or that, the kingdom of God passed us by and may well have found instead those whom we judge to be wicked, impious, sinful. . . . We can only beg God to call us in such a way that our ears will be opened, that we will hear his call and come. We can only beg him to give us the strength of a brave and unselfish heart, so that we will not make excuses that, in the sight of God and in the pitiless light of his eternity, are no excuses at all.¹

Meaning for Luke

Looking at the parable beyond the moral lesson it conveys, many scholars understand it in light of the evangelist's understanding of why preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles, after its refusal by the religious leaders of the Jews, derives, even if implicitly, from Jesus himself.

The parable's surprise comes from the fact that the master neither

¹ Karl Rahner, *The Great Church Year* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1993), 301.

forces the hand of the invited guests nor does he falter in his promise to hold the feast. He turns around and sends his servant to fill the banquet hall, scouring the streets for new guests, those who had not previously been invited because he wants a full house.

The feast will now be held for the poor and the crippled, the blind and the lame and those by the wayside, on the periphery – to use Francis’s language. These become the guests of the master and share in the feast prepared. Even though they are not among the first invited, his call renders them worthy of enjoying the banquet.

Here, then, we have a lesson in the utter gratuity and boundlessness of God’s grace and the universal call to salvation: the Lord calls whom he wills. And that will is all-inclusive. No one – even the privilege of being among the Chosen People, has a claim on salvation. Neither ethnic origin nor sanctioned religious practices are what counts, but accepting the invitation to be loved by God as shown by his invitation to the wedding feast.

Liturgical Meaning

Lastly, a third level of meaning can be unearthed in the parable, and it is one perhaps particularly appropriate for us today. As you know, the Book of Revelation refers to as the Wedding Feast of the Lamb, where the Lamb is the Son of God who, by means of his perfect sacrifice, brings about his union with the Church, his Bride. And in the

Scriptures and Tradition of the Church, this union of Christ and the Church, this intimacy of the Bridegroom with Bride, is realized for us sacramentally in the Eucharist.

What we have in this parable, then, is an allusion to the Eucharist and of our response to this Banquet, participation in which is the foretaste of eternal life.

God the Father is the one who gives the supper: “My supper is prepared”; “Come, for everything is ready now” (Lk 14:17), and he sends out his servants – each one of us, clergy, Religious and laity alike – to gather in all those who were invited.

But, as we know, many of the invited – the baptized – turn down the invitation without a serious reason. Knowingly or not, this is an enormous affront, a slap in the face, the rejection of a gift. It bespeaks indifference, simply caring little for the grace offered to them. The invited guests thought they had better things to do, to attend to their more pressing earthly affairs.

The question for us to ponder is twofold: how am I responding to the Lord’s call to celebrate Eucharist: Am I indifferent? Do I come lackadaisically and unprepared? And second, do I go out to invite others, those on the periphery, to Mass? When was the last time I invited someone to come to church with me?

As faithful and humble servants we are, each of us, “dispatched” or

“sent forth” to bring the Good News to those whom the Master has invited, and that includes those whom we might consider as “outsiders.” As Pope Francis so often repeats, we cannot be a self-referential, closed Church, resting content with our cosy community, but must be constantly filled with the enthusiasm of the Spirit who pushes us beyond our comfort zone to the highways and byways of our wounded and waiting world.

If there is one group that should set an example of missionary zeal for others it is, I think, precisely those who love the liturgy. To celebrate the sacred mysteries with beauty and authenticity, with God’s grace we must do all we can to ensure that the banquet hall is full, for the Lord’s invitation extends to everyone.

Conclusion

As we continue our Eucharist now, let’s resolve to be ever more mindful that what the Lord has prepared for us is challenge to realize St. Paul’s admonition: “We who are many, are body in Christ, and individually we are members of one another” (Rom 12:5).

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