

TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY-CYCLE A

It's only a wedding. At a wedding, everyone knows- from the mother of the bride to the father of the groom, that some invited guests won't be able to make it. Some, won't even have the decency or respect to even respond to the invitation! But, it is only a wedding.

So maybe some of the guests will show up looking as if they are in the federal witness protection program; only it's the fashion police they should be hiding from!

But, it's only a wedding. Jesus' parable today is harsh; there is no way getting around that fact. And hearing our Lord teach that this parable is really about the Kingdom of Heaven makes the harshness seem even worse. I mean, how politically incorrect can You be, Lord?

Yet, from the beginning of the Church, the king in this parable has been known to be God our Father. Today, like it or not, we come face to face with His anger; His justifiable anger, I might add.

But Jesus didn't begin this parable with talk of God's anger and neither will I. Note how, at the very beginning of the parable, the king isn't angry at anybody. In honor of his son's marriage (and remember, our Lord Jesus is the Bridegroom, the Church His Bride and the Holy Mass, the wedding Banquet), the king throws a party and send invitations far and wide.

There's no anger. There is simply grace. The invited guests refuse to come; why, no one knows. When the first of those invited refuse, the anger begins. But note very carefully; judgment comes only *after* the invitation is refused. Again, grace always comes first.

Then of course, "both the good and bad alike" are invited. Everyone receives the king's favor and offer of grace. He doesn't care if they have more skeletons in their closet than a Halloween supply store! No one is outside the king's favor. Grace is always first.

And that's what makes the next scene so hard. A man shows up, doesn't meet the dress code and gets tossed out into the darkness. How does this fit with Jesus' message? Besides, where are the guests from the street going to come up with the right clothes?

The parable doesn't come right out and say it, but the clothes must be from the king himself! The king knew those he invited. He knew their histories and their backgrounds; he knew their lives. He must have opened his own wardrobe as everyone, good and bad, came in off the streets. They had to be given something to wear by the king himself. So when the king comes to our poorly dressed friend, imagine a nice suit of clothes right there at his feet, given as a gift, but refused to be put on.

It's as if the man said, "No thanks, your majesty. I prefer to wear my own clothes. I know you really don't care what I look like." Now the righteous anger becomes clearer doesn't it?

We come to Jesus Christ with our own "clothes," our lives, soiled with sin. We've been provided the very finest to wear....the sacramental graces of the Church. Christ Himself has said to us, "Here, you look much better in this." Grace is always first.

And yet, how often do we find ourselves like our friend in the parable who refused to wear the clothes provided for him? How often do we persist in wearing the soiled rags of our sins when we come to the holy banquet that is the Eucharist and go forth from It?

"Putting on Christ," as St. Paul puts it, is risky. It means laying ourselves open to being made new and changed to look like Jesus; to wear the clothing of sacramental grace given us. It also means laying open our lives to be found wearing our old rags in place of the graced clothing of the saints. Grace always comes first. It remains for all of us, personally, to respond.