

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson
15th October - 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Readings (Year A): 1st: Isaiah 25:6-10. 2nd: Philippians 4:12-14,19-20. **Gospel:** Matthew 22:1-14.

Most people like a party. We know children love parties to celebrate their birthdays. The coming months bring many around the festival to celebrate the birth of Christ. A great occasion too is the wedding banquet.

In the 1st reading Isaiah catches something of all those in his depiction of the banquet God prepares for all people on the holy mountain, the place of God's presence. It is to this mountain the God invites all of humanity to participate in the greatest celebration there could ever be. Not just eating and drinking, but the end of death itself, and of sadness and grief which death brings. The glimpse of the future which Isaiah offers is the symbolic representation of God's purpose, not just for the people of Israel, but for all people.

This is why God created us – to know joy without end in his presence. As St Paul tells in our 2nd reading: God lavishly fulfils all our needs.

Jesus takes up this image of a banquet to express what God is offering. The picture now is not of some far-distant future, but much more immediate: The invitations have been sent out and now everything is ready, since the king's son, Jesus, is here for his wedding feast. Yet strangely, now the day has arrived, the invited guests seem reluctant to come. They make many excuses. The people do not respond to Jesus' presence. They seem to resent the intrusion and respond to the invitation with rejection and violence. But in rejecting the invitation, they reject God himself, and Jesus warns of the dire consequences of this rejection.

However, God doesn't give up – the invitation is extended further, not just to the chosen people, but to the whole world – the highways and byways. All are invited to God's kingdom, good and bad alike. God freely and generously invites all people to the banquet of life.

Why was the invitation rejected in the first place? We need only to look at ourselves and people around us to realise how easy it is to making excuses for not responding to God's invitation in our own lives.

We can too busy with work or business; we are too preoccupied with money problems or relationships; we are too young, too old, too clever, or not clever enough.

Does religion and church seem too unattractive, too restrictive, too negative, too joyless? Making room for God in our life isn't about making us more serious, strange or solemn. Having God in our life simply means becoming more alive, more human, more purposeful, knowing we have an eternal destiny, the promise of joyful life without end with God.

Jesus says: it's about being invited to a fantastic party, to the celebration of life with God in all its fulness. Our faith is about life and joy and love and hope; God's purpose for us all.

The man without the wedding garment is not really about clothing but represents to good works which must always go hand in hand with faith. That is the white garment we receive at our baptism, of commitment to repentance and good works. The words are 'You have become a new creation and have clothed yourself in Christ. See in this white garment the outward sign of your Christian dignity. With your family and friends to help you by word and example, bring that dignity unstained into the everlasting life of heaven.' That white garment surrounds us on our last journey, as the angels lead us on. Without these works, no one is really ready for the feast of heaven.

Christianity especially today, doesn't need negative, passive messengers who lack passion and conviction. Have we become too depressed by the bad news that we are forgetting to tell the good news? Christians are invited to enjoy the feast, to participate fully in it and to radiate that joy to others.