

YEAR A - THE YEAR OF MATTHEW

# THE HOLY GOSPEL

PENTECOST 17    OCTOBER 9, 2011



*The Holy Gospel is according to St. Matthew the 22nd Chapter.*

**Glory to you, O Lord**

**O**nce more Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: {2} "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. {3} He sent his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding banquet, but they would not come. {4} Again he sent other slaves, saying, 'Tell those who have been invited: Look, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet.' {5} But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business, {6} while the rest seized his slaves, mistreated them, and killed them. {7} The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city. {8} Then he said to his slaves, 'The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. {9} Go therefore

into the main streets, and invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet.' {10} Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both good and bad; so the wedding hall was filled with guests. {11} "But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe, {12} and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding robe?' And he was speechless. {13} Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' {14} For many are called, but few are chosen."

*This is the Gospel of the Lord.*

**Praise to you, O Christ.**

Sermon - October 9, 2011

Year A - Year of Matthew - Pentecost 17

Isaiah 25:1-9; Psalm 23; Philippians 4:4-13; Matthew 22:1-14

I love the Gospel readings that are assigned by the lectionary during the summer months. Those summer month's readings, they are so peaceful in so many ways. There are stories about planting seeds or catching fish. The summer stories speak about Jesus performing miracles

such as feeding the five thousand or walking on water. They have beautiful discourses or narratives where Jesus teaches about his body being the bread of life. The readings we have during the summer are able to touch each of us in some personal way that I find healing, uplifting, or comforting.

However, a change begins to happen as we enter the fall. The readings often become harsher. They frequently focus on judgment. The words of Jesus during this time of year do not sound as soft or as sweet in the sense they expose our weakness to sin and the way in which we often want to shove the faith to the side. The readings in the fall often contain words about Judgment Day. If we look at these readings honestly, they are much less comfortable.

Today's parable in Matthew's Gospel is just such a reading; if we listen closely, it contains some things that may be difficult to understand. The story, like last week, is an allegory. That means Jesus uses the people

in the story to represent other people about whom he is talking.

The king in the story stands for God the Father. The invited guests are the children of Israel. The people found in the highways and byways are probably the Gentiles, and phrase "the king's troops" is probably a reference to the Romans who burned Jerusalem in AD 70. However, in the end, Jesus is talking about you and me. The words he says may have been spoken before the audience of his day, but the words are said directly to you and me.

What matters in this story is that the king gave a banquet and the invitations to the chosen guests were rejected. The words used in the story are more troubling than outright rejection. Matthew's Gospel says, "But they made light of it and went away, one to his farm, another to his business..." In other words, the guests did more than simply choose not to go, they mocked the fact they were even asked. This was troubling then, twenty centuries ago, it is true

and troubling today.

They mocked that they were even invited to attend the banquet hosted by the Father.

Our world still makes light of the Good News of God. You can look anywhere and see it. It is not just that the Gospel is ignored; it is ridiculed. The word "God" is used in the most casual and disrespectful manner imaginable. The name of Jesus has become a curse or punch line rather than a prayer. Instead of approaching the Creator in awe, we encounter apathy and blasphemy. People are frightened of religious expressions of faith and in their fear they use ridicule. "They make light of it." The weightiest subject on earth, the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, is a matter of indifference, of disbelief, of ridicule.

Unfortunately, this is true even within the church when we look at Jesus' words with a wink and a nod. It is true when we forget "You shall have no other gods," or

"Remember the Sabbath and keep it holy." It is true when we twist the Word of God to fit what we want rather than conforming our lives to God's Word. These things happen in the pews as well as the loftiest offices in church headquarters.

However, there is something important in this passage from Matthew. It is something right in front of us, and so we may not see it. Notice that the passage does not say that because the invited guests did not come to the banquet, the wedding was canceled. No. The wedding and the feast were to go on as scheduled; only the guest list was changed.

God does not alter his plans because of the indifference of human beings. God does not withdraw the feast. The feast is still there for those who would honor the invitation. However, most of us have other things to think about. We do not have time to worship, read God's Word, or study what God says; we have things to do. We tend to think that because we do not have time,

we are free to do as we wish.

However, look closely at this parable; Jesus is telling us that there is no excuse for staying away from the Kingdom. No excuse is acceptable because spiritual survival is at stake. Never the less, humans throughout time find excuses and are attracted by the affairs of the world more than by the needs of the spirit.

"The world is too much with us," the poet said. We are too consumed; our lives are too busy and cluttered; they are too noisy to hear the invitation to a banquet of joy. We have found other things to occupy our time and consume our energy. When we are asked to take time to pray, to learn God's truth, to share it with others, to focus on what is of eternal importance instead of on temporary needs, well, too often the cares of this world loom much greater than the cares of the Kingdom.

Listen to what St. Paul says to the Philippians about this banquet of joy. "Rejoice in

the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice."

How does Saint Paul say that this joy manifests itself? He says, "In gentleness, in awareness of the nearness of Christ, and in peace." We bring our prayers before God with thanksgiving, he tells us. St. Paul urges those who have heard God's invitation to the banquet to reflect it in our lives by thinking of whatever is honorable, true, pure, pleasing, commendable, of things that are excellent and worthy of praise. Paul tells the Philippians, he has learned to be content through him who strengthens him, through Christ who was his life.

That brings us to the paradox of this invitation to a banquet of joy. The Matthew's passage tells us that after the initial rejection, the servants went out into the streets and invited both those who were good and those who were bad. They were invited because of the generosity of the king, not because they had done something to deserve the invitation. This says something to us.

How many of us are hesitating still because of fear that attending the feast will make too many demands upon our time, will limit our worldly pleasures, will dilute our ambitions? There is no question that the one who makes the offer will not accept second place in our affection. However, the one who calls us knows our limits. The Kingdom is not reserved just for over-achievers. It is for all of us. It is for each one of us limits and all. We do not achieve the kingdom, it is a free gift. To serve and celebrate in the Kingdom, well, Christ is the one who strengthens us. It is the banquet that gives us strength. It is the banquet that saves our lives. God's banquet of joy changes our sense of what is important and of value.

The banquet comes to us through God's Word, Sacraments, Baptism, and forgiveness. We cannot do it on our own. If we think we can achieve it on our own, we are mistaken. In the story, there is a man who entered without a wedding robe. In other words, he came not by grace, God's Word,

or Sacraments, but by his own power. In doing so, he rejected the free gift of the invitation. He thought he could earn his way without the cross of Jesus. This man was cast out. The Kingdom is not about the overachievers; it is about the faithful.

How barren the heart is outside this banquet hall. How much we would miss of companionship and of the peace that passes understanding!

Why should we ignore such an invitation? The banquet has been set for us the good and the bad, the weak and the strong. We are all dependent upon our Lord. Therefore, we sing with Isaiah,

It will be said on that day,  
Lo, this is our God; we have  
waited for him, so that he  
might save us.  
This is the Lord for whom we  
have waited;  
Let us be glad and rejoice in his  
salvation. Amen.