

TRINITY 20
FOR MANY ARE CALLED BUT FEW ARE CHOSEN

Text: Matt. 22:1, Ephesians 5:15

“And when the king had come in to see the guests, he saw that there was a man without a wedding garment, and he said to him, friend, how is it that you have come without a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then the king said to his servants, bind him hand and foot and cast him out to the outer darkness, and there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen.”

For many are called, but few are chosen? What a scary thought. We are all familiar with this Gospel lesson and what the Lord is trying to tell those listening. We know about how Jesus came to save God’s chosen people, how God’s invitation to the wedding feast was ignored or turned down, even indeed how they killed the messenger, our Lord Himself. In this metaphor we hear about how the invitation would be extended to others, specifically the Gentiles, and how many would come to the feast, the Kingdom of Heaven. But this last line is perhaps the most significant, the most telling and the one that need give us the most pause, “For many are called but few are chosen.”

In the few lines before, our Lord refers to the guest who came and when the king saw that he was not wearing a wedding garment, instructed his servants to cast the guest out. Now one might ask, what wedding garment is he referring to? Was the man poorly dressed? Did he insult the host by not wearing proper attire?

To put his in context, we must look at other parts of Scripture. Isaiah (11:5) refers to righteousness as a garment worn by the believer. St. John in Revelation says “happy are those who wash their robes clean and so have the right to eat the fruit from the tree of life and enter into the gates of the city”. (22:14). But it is St. Paul who clarifies for us in his epistles what our Lord is referring to. St. Paul sees our renewal in Christ, our changed heart, our trust in God and our desire for repentance as the true cloak of righteousness. This is the garment of which the Lord speaks. A garment that clothes each of in spirit and truth, and allows us to enter into the heavenly wedding feast.

It is for each of us a renewal, a setting aside of worldly things and focusing on pleasing God by offering ourselves as a living sacrifice to Him in thanksgiving for all of His blessings. Wow! Easy to say but a lot tougher to do. Perhaps God is asking too much of us, perhaps the goal is too high, perhaps being worthy of God is an impossibility.

That is why Jesus came to us and died for our sins on the cross. That was the expression of the depth of God’s love for us, sending His only son “that whosoever believes shall not perish but have eternal life.”

In Bible study we are looking at Paul’s letters to the Corinthians. Here was an early church, that unlike some of the other churches that grew up around Paul’s missionary work, did not quite get the message. First, they believed that if Jesus died for their sins, that they were all set. They could go on sinning because they had been saved and Paul found that they had sunk into deep immorality. On top of that, they were constantly fighting with each other, divisions had grown up in the church, people were taking sides and it was one constant battle after another. Boy, am I glad those days are gone! Finally, they were questioning the church, the Scriptures and even trying to approach God philosophically. You can see the depth of Paul’s frustration in his writings and his trying to offer guidance. They just were not listening.

In all of his letters to the early churches, Paul tries to get those listening to understand one important thing. It is about the relationship each of us has individually with our Lord and Savior that defines if we will or will not, be granted a place at the great heavenly feast which is eternal life. In his letter to the Ephesians he says “See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.” That is, do not be of this world, identifying with God through the world’s wisdom and trying to make God into what we believe He should be like but instead setting aside our old ways and seeking God with our true desire to be closer to Him and glorify Him in all that we do.

It seems that so many of our messages revolve around the same thing, found throughout Holy Scripture. It is that we all fall short of God's grace, that we are redeemed by the blood of Christ on the cross, that we are to have a changed and repentant heart and come before God in truth, that we are to glorify God in all that we do, that we are to do good works through our faith and that we are to spread the Gospel. But we are also to remember that when we fall, God picks us up, that when we face man's evil or sickness or even death, He gives us strength, and that nothing separates us from the love of our Lord and Savior-except us. For in our free will, we can always turn from God, but even then He will take us back.

I was astonished to listen to National Public Radio recently where I heard an interview by a celebrity who wrote a book called "Letting Go of God". In her book she detailed how she slowly and methodically separated herself from the belief that God exists and how the church, the death of a close family member and her own disappointment in life had convinced her that God was a myth and that the reality of life and science defined the true meanings of existence. She detailed in her book all the disappointments with the God she had been introduced to through the church, the failings of the clergy, the lack of comfort and solace and finally how she came to the conclusion that if this was what the almighty had to offer, then she wasn't interested. God did not turn her from His love, man's practice of Christianity did.

We see all of the things that separate us from God manifested in our actions and how we act toward one another. We call ourselves followers of Christ yet our Bibles collect dust, our pews remain empty for all sorts of excuses and our hearts still search for the peace and comfort we hear about that comes from God. St. Paul knew this, the early church knew this and we know it now. If we are to be one of His, then we must remember this very direct and important passage-"Many are called but few are chosen".

Let each of us take stock of ourselves, our faith, the truthfulness of our hearts and the practice of our belief. In our worship and in our daily lives, are we focused on God or just going through the motions? Are we in our arrogance, like the Corinthians, convinced that we are good with God, or have we made God in our own image?

At every Mass we hear the message of our Lord. "You shall love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, you shall love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

To love God means that we shall submit ourselves to Him, putting aside our own wants and desires. To love one another means to set aside all of our needs for the needs of others, to set aside our hatreds and conflicts, and be made right with each other. These are tall orders because they mean that we give up ourselves to God and to each other-just as He gave Himself up to be dragged to Golgotha and nailed to the cross. When we give ourselves to God, He in turn will dress us for the wedding feast.

Let us all examine ourselves, let us all look into our hearts, let us all look at our actions and our deeds and ask ourselves if all that we do glorifies God. But even more important, let us look at our faith and ask ourselves if a deep personal relationship with God is the goal of our journey through life. If the answer is no, then He is calling out to you. If the answer is yes, then you shall be clothed with righteousness for the wedding feast. AMEN