

28th Sunday (A)

- I'm reminded of a wedding feast that I attended as a young priest after I officiated at the marriage ceremony.
- Having been to many wedding receptions, I've come to know that they aren't really occasions for deep conversations for a number of reasons, because of the loud music, people having consumed a fair bit of alcohol, & simply because they're just meant to be parties, but on this occasion, I was having a conversation with an interesting & interested young man who was also trying to understand me & why I was a priest.
- It was a time that I was particularly interested in what was known as Liberation theology – a really practical Catholic theology that was born out of the struggle & poverty of Latin American people.
- It was type of theology that didn't come from the intellectual rationalizing in texts books, but from the lived & marginalized experience of poor & oppressed people.
- I said that some time in the future I'd like to work as a priest in one of the Latin American countries because there is a desperate need for priests to lead communities that live in extreme poverty & oppression & because I could learn so much from them. (Needless to say that this never happened anyway).
- But his reply took me aback & made me rethink a few things.
- He said – "In a sense, ministering to people in those missionary situations can be easier because in their oppressed & impoverished situations of life, they are aware of their need for God & they can have a greater capacity for perceiving God working in their lives in the smallest of things; it is more challenging in a country like our own where our lives are filled with so many things & opportunities, that we aren't even aware of a need for God, let alone being perceptive to God."
- It's hard to imagine, given the power & extent of the Church throughout history till today, how Jesus & Christianity began with a set of marginal people – people on the edge of society – Gallileans, fishermen & tax collectors, women – often people of little or no account in the eyes of society – the church began because of them & with them.
- They were the ones who come very eagerly to the wedding feast about which today's Gospel tells us – they are the ones who are open to respond to the invitation - What about the people who count, the people of standing, those who are honoured because of their status in society, because of their possessions, power & influence, those in authority?
- In today's Gospel Jesus sounds a warning to them – if they are not attentive, the feast will be celebrated without them.
- The "important" people miss their opportunity because they have excluded themselves – they have no time, yearning or even need for God.

- Those who do, are the marginalized, vulnerable & dispossessed, who have come to understand the broadmindedness of God's welcome & forgiveness which gives people another chance for a fuller, more enriching life.
- The Old & New Testaments are ultimately concerned with God's reign/kingdom – a way of being in right relationships with God, others & oneself; not a geographical place, not even as a place in the future that we might call 'heaven', but rather, a way, a state of being, wherein God's values & standards, God's dream for us as human beings, is made a reality & realized by us.
- As a way of being, God's kingdom cannot be defined, but analogies & stories are used by Jesus to describe its nature & character, & interestingly, it is often described in very earthy terms such as a banquets, parties or wedding feasts – joyful, celebratory situations we can identify with, not some ephemeral, spiritualized concepts.
- The decisive character of God's reign is oneness, inclusiveness & harmony with God & one another – they are interdependent.
- God desires for us the abundance, happiness & fulfillment of life-giving relationships.
- The parable reminds us that the invitation of God is to a feast as joyous as a wedding banquet – his invitation is to joy.
- To think of Christianity as a gloomy, giving-up of good things & as a damper on joy is to mistake its whole nature - it is to joy that we're all invited & it is this joy that we miss if we refuse the invitation.
- The things that make people deaf to the invitation, like in the parable, are not wrong in themselves – the people go on with their own businesses, they can't afford the time or distraction from what they count as their priorities; maybe this time of Pandemic alerts us to more important priorities.
- We too can attend to important things in our own lives, but at the same time miss attending to the more subtle life-giving things.
- So much of our time & energy is spent either climbing the economic ladder or just trying to keep our heads above water.
- The tragedy of life & relationships is that it is often the 2nd bests that shut out the most important things.
- We can be so busy making a living that we fail to make a life; we can be so busy with the administration & business of life that we fail to really live.
- Throughout this parable of the wedding feast there is a strong teaching about how much you & I depend on God, whether we realise it or not.
- We're compelled to ask the question as to who are the 'shunned' and 'left out' in our society today? Who do we exclude? Who would Jesus be reaching out to and seeking to include in today's society?
- May we be people who hunger for what God offers & witness to the joy & life-giving nature of being kingdom people that includes those who experience exclusion.