

Homily101517

WHAT'S WITH THE GUY WITHOUT THE WEDDING GARMENT?

Jesus told parables all the time. The ones recorded in the Scriptures are the ones he told most frequently and so people remembered them or the ones that were a little over the top and people were intrigued or puzzled by them. Today's parable is one of the stranger ones because Jesus tells it to give an illustration about what the Kingdom of God is like and it seems to include rejection of offered hospitality, an army destroying those rejecting the invitation, another invitation that includes everybody and one guy who didn't seem to get the memo about making sure he wore a wedding garment. To our modern ears it seems a little harsh that the king destroys those who rejected his invitation and then has this guy bound up and thrown out into the night to wail and gnash his teeth.

So what is it about the guy without the wedding garment? We tend to feel sorry for him. What if he couldn't afford one, we ask. But here's the thing. How come everybody else has a wedding garment on? What is the meaning of the wedding garment other than just something you wear to a wedding? Everybody is wearing one because the king provided them for everyone. It's not about the kind of clothes you are wearing that matters. The wedding garment is what you are clothed with. The king offers forgiveness. "Here, wrap yourself in this." The king offers mercy and compassion. The king offers love. "Here, put all these on and take your proper place at the banquet which celebrates my love for you and my union with you in and through my son. Remember the banquet is a wedding banquet for the king's son. Who is the spouse-to-be? We aren't told but we are led to surmise that the spouse is us. Jesus is the king's son and he is the bridegroom betrothed to us human beings to draw us into intimate union with his Father through his love for us.

The guy without the wedding garment is the guy who took the forgiveness but didn't forgive anybody in turn. He never really wrapped himself in that gift. He accepted the mercy and compassion but offered none to anyone who had injured or offended him. He basked in the love of God but extended it to no one. And when the Lord points this out points out all that he has extended to him and how the fellow in turn gave nothing to anyone—the man is reduced to silence. And believe me, we don't ever want to be reduced to silence before the awesome and forgiving God.

You don't extend to others what the Lord has offered you? Then you will find yourself all tied up in knots and living in the dark and never really "getting it" and cursing and hating all of it. God doesn't have to do that to us. We do it to ourselves. It is our call. Entirely. It is all about our freedom.

This whole parable is about freedom and the consequences which follow from using our freedom correctly or misusing it. It is helpful to realize that this parable is located at the end of the gospel of Matthew. Jesus has already made his triumphant entry into Jerusalem. Who is Jesus telling the parable to? All the people? No. It is to the Religious authorities in Jerusalem and in the Temple authorities. And the meaning is that they were the first ones invited to the banquet and they should have been overjoyed to be so invited because of all they claimed to teach the people about God. But no. They turned away because what God was offering was not what they were wanting to hear. They were no longer interested in what God actually was offering. They knew what they wanted and they resisted the rest. I think there is a little of that going on today right here in our own country.

In their own minds they had all received better offers than the invitation to the wedding of the king's son. They used their freedom to dismiss the most gracious invitation they would ever receive. We choose to attend or not to attend gatherings all the time. Just look at the Lord's Day and our commandments to "Render it holy." People walk away from that all the time with hardly a thought. Sports, music and dance, karate, robotics are all deemed more important than the faith formation of children. Choosing to affirm the secular values of our culture rather than the more difficult moral choices that come from being a Catholic occurs frequently. No one thinks any of that in terms of this gospel but it actually does apply.

Things were fine in Israel in 66AD until the Jews rose up and tried to overthrow the Romans who then showed up with a force of sixty thousand soldiers and systematically destroyed the country. All the religious leaders died either at the hands of the Romans or at the hands of the extremist zealots of the Jews. These same religious leaders had rejected Jesus and his way of life and now the king in Rome has sent his army to destroy them. The people who watched the Temple be destroyed and the land destroyed would hear this parable of Jesus with a different set of ears than we do. But the warning applies to us just the same. This parable is a warning to us to get our act together and stop substituting our own way of doing and seeing things and start accepting the way of Jesus Christ. No time like the present. Let's wrap ourselves in that truth.