

Dressed for the Banquet
Homily for August 19, 2021

In the Gospel for today Jesus tells a parable central to the biblical story line. We are in a love story, culminating in the marriage of the Son of God. Now for any of you who have planned a wedding, you know it is a very involved affair. There are so many dimension to the celebratory event that take months and sometimes years to get ready for the big day.

When the wedding day comes, the way people dress stands out. There is of course the bride, in her beautiful dress, the groom and those attending the couple. Then there are the guests who don their Sunday best.

Yes at a wedding the way we dress speaks of the importance of the day. For at a wedding we are dressed for a celebratory banquet.

In the parable we are told that the king of the son had been planning for the wedding for centuries. At the heart of today's Gospel is the retelling of the biblical story. The servants, are the Old Testament prophets, whose writing anticipate centuries ahead the coming of Jesus. Invitations are sent out but repeatedly they are dismissed by those who receive them. They have other things that take precedent. So opposed are some that they treat cruelly and even kill some who have the invitations. This is Jesus way of saying there are some who don't want anything do to with God's love story.

Then we get to the actual wedding ceremony. There is present at the banquet one who is not wearing the appropriate attire.

What is this about? Jesus is teaching us here that to live as those who are responsive to the wedding invitation, we are to recognize that we are to be active participants in the party. In the book of Revelation we read of the banquet that we will participate in the fullness of heavenly glory, what is termed the wedding supper of the lamb. There the wedding garments are described as the righteous deeds of the saints.

Here is the point of the parable. Jesus wants us to discover the deeds we do to live as those sharing in the wedding banquet stem from sharing in the story of love that God is writing. Jesus wants us to discover when we are joined to him we are part of the great wedding.

But here is the sobering take home message. In the course of our life, we can lose the plot of the story line. Rather than seeing it as a love story, we think the story of life is about trying to control others and bargain with God.

That is what is at the heart of the story from Judges. Jephthah thought by making a ludicrous and impulsive deal with God, that he would be able to defeat Israel's enemies. But here is the irony. In the book of Leviticus we read:

You shall not give any of your children to devote them by fire to Molech, and so profane the name of your God: I am the Lord.

Now the Ammonites, the very people Jephthah defeated, worshipped Molech and as part of their worship they sacrificed their children. So while Jephthah thinks he is serving the true God – he is not dressed for the love story, but for a story of terror and the consequences are devastating. For his vow is one the Ammonites would make, not one a servant of the true God should voice.

One commentator concluded regarding this story:

The making of the vow is an act of unfaithfulness. Jephthah desires to bind God rather than embrace the gift of the spirit. What comes to him freely, he seeks to earn and manipulate. The meaning of his words is doubt, not faith; it is control, not courage. To such a vow the deity makes no reply.¹

Beloved brothers and sisters not all religious words and practices conform to the love story of Jesus' wedding banquet. This is why Jesus is so strong in his words of judgment and why the ill-clad guest is sent into the outer darkness. Although the invitation is issued to us all, for many are called, not all discern what it is to live in close and trusting fellowship with God, so few are chosen.

Today's reading inspires us to take to heart that whenever we come to the banquet of the Eucharist we are sharing in the love story. Such a story than influences the way we dress for as St. Paul says in Colossians 3:

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience.¹⁴ And over all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

Such attire is what Jesus is looking for among those who are called to dress for the wedding banquet of heaven.

¹ McCann, J. C. (2002). [*Judges*](#) (1st ed., p. 82). Louisville, KY: John Knox Press.