

Inspired by a formidable hope

Homily for October 15, 2023

28th Sunday Ordinary Time

There is much that we could focus on from today's readings. I want to consider one image from the Gospel, tie it to the first reading and then make an application by reference to a petition I am going to invite you to sign.

In today's parable we hear of many who responded to the invitation to the King's banquet and they are having a wonderful time. However, Jesus tells us of one man who is not appropriately attired.

In ancient Palestine, one of the social customs at wedding banquets was for the host to provide a festive garment for all the guests - it was almost like what a welcome gift is for modern parties. It could be something as simple as a colored scarf or shawl. With all the guests wearing this garment, an atmosphere of unity and joy was created, and the special honor of the bride and bridegroom (who were wearing different garments), was emphasized.

In the parable, after the banquet has begun, the king comes in to greet the guests. And lo and behold, he finds a guest without a wedding garment. There are only two possible reasons why a guest wouldn't have a wedding garment: either he sneaked in without being invited, or he didn't care about celebrating the wedding and just wanted to enjoy the food and drink while doing his own thing. In either case, such a guest is not a guest at all - he has no relationship to the bride and bridegroom, and so he has no reason to be there. And so the king threw him out, into a place where there was weeping and gnashing of teeth. This represents a place of separation from the grace-filled celebration and is an allegorical representation of hell.

Now it is important to know this detail about Jesus' parable. He gives this parable on the Tuesday of Holy Week. Within three days he will be crucified and so he wants to leave us with this important story shortly before his own death.

When we try to follow Jesus without accepting his will and the teaching of his Church, we are trying to get into the wedding banquet while refusing to put on the wedding garment. Christianity is not a self-help buffet where we can pick and choose according to personal preference; it's the revelation of God, and it requires humility, obedience, and trust.

When we allow ourselves to live in light of Jesus' revelation, we echo St Paul, who says in Philippians:

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me".

How is this possible? Because those who wear the wedding garment of grace capture something of the theme on display in our first reading which strengthens us to live rightly ordered to the King and his Son.

Here we have an image of the ultimate banquet in heaven. Notice what will characterize that celebration. It will be a feast for all peoples, characterized by delicious food and well-aged wines. This represents the extravagant generosity of God. Notice as well that in this feast death will be swallowed up forever. Those who are captured by this vision choose to live in this world appropriately attired.

Let me tell you about this man who wore the wedding garment. This is Dr. Jerome Lejeune. He was the French geneticist who in 1958, identified the genetic defect that causes Down's syndrome. He was one of the most highly regarded geneticists of the twentieth century. Both as a Catholic and a scientist he upheld the dignity of human life. For Lejeune, the legalization of abortion was not just morally objectionable; it constituted an assault against and an expression of contempt for science. Genetics demonstrated that at the very moment the ovum is fertilized by the sperm, all of the genetic information that defines the resulting individual is already inscribed in its entirety in the first cell. No new genetic information enters into an egg at any stage after its initial fertilization. Thus, Dr. Lejeune maintained:

Genetic science postulates that a human being could not be a human being if not first conceived as a human being.¹

That Catechism reiterates this same claim when in paragraph 2270 we read:

Human life must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception. From the first moment of his existence, a human being must be recognized as having the rights of a person—among which is the inviolable right of every innocent being to life²

In 1969 Dr. Lejeune received the William Allan Award. This award recognizes substantial and far-reaching scientific contributions to human genetics, and was established in 1961.

In his speech Dr. Lejeune noted:

For millennia, medicine has striven to fight for life and health and against disease and death. Any reversal of the order of these terms of reference would entirely change medicine itself,"

This he argued is what was happening with the legalization of abortion. After the speech, which received a cool reception, he reportedly told his wife:

"Today, I lost my Nobel Prize in medicine."

¹ Havard, Alexandre. *Virtuous Leadership: An Agenda for Personal Excellence*. Scepter Publishers. Kindle Edition.

² Catholic Church. (2000). [*Catechism of the Catholic Church*](#) (2nd Ed., p. 547). United States Catholic Conference.

In 1994, Pope St John Paul II named Lejeune as the first president of the Pontifical Academy for Life. The physician died just 33 days later in Paris, on April 2, 1994, at the age of 67.

On January 21, 2021 Pope Francis recognized the heroic virtue of Dr. Lejeune for his advocacy for life and contribution to the field of genetics.

One writer reflected on Dr. Lejeune life's work this way:

In view of the moral relativism and intellectual skepticism so prevalent in western culture of his (and our) time, Lejeune's cause seemed doomed from the start. But, as his daughter Clara said of him,

“his realism was inspired by a formidable hope.”³

What was that hope? The hope of the one attired for the wedding supper the Gospel and Isaiah. The hope centred on the Pauline trust that “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”.

It is with this in mind that I want to invite you to consider being inspired by this same formidable hope. There is a petition in the Narthex that is being circulated in Churches across Canada this month. And while we are realistic in recognizing that it will not turn the policy of the Canadian Parliament towards laws curtailing abortion, it allows us to express our concerns about the absence of any law in Canada limiting abortion.

From December 5-8 2019 a poll done by Dart & Maru/ Blu asking about restrictions on abortions. 1,515 randomly selected members of Maru/Blue's Voice Canada Online panel were surveyed from December 5 to 8. The results were weighted by education, age, gender, and region to match the Canadian population. When asked if abortion should be legal or illegal during the last three months of pregnancy 70% percent responded there should be restrictions.

Here is another interesting (and hopeful) feature of the current landscape in Canada. According to the Globe and Mail there are more crisis pregnancy centres than abortion clinics.

May I therefore invite you to join your voice to other Christians by signing the petition in the Narthex. It will be available for the next three Sundays, if you need time to prayerfully consider this invitation.

May we never tire of being a people whose lives are inspired by the Gospel within a society that so readily disregards the wedding garment of the grace-filled life. Dr. Jerome Lejeune is an encouragement for all committed to the prolife movement so that our realism is also inspired by the formidable hope where we can say:

³ Havard, Alexandre. *Virtuous Leadership: An Agenda for Personal Excellence*. Scepter Publishers. Kindle Edition.

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me”.