

In today's Gospel the Lord asks the question:

You cannot make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them, can you?

In Jewish wedding customs, as depicted for instance in the Wedding at Cana, the celebration went on for a week, not just an evening reception and a breakfast gift opening, as is more the norm here in Canada. When two young people married in Palestine they did not go away for a honeymoon; they stayed at home, and for a week kept open house. They dressed in their best; sometimes they even wore crowns; for that week they were king and queen and their word was law. The daily routine of life was hard and they would never again have a week like that. And the favoured guests who shared this festive week were called the children of the bride-chamber.¹

Jesus takes what would have been a common experience in the life and his contemporaries and relates this custom to his ministry. His coming was like a Palestinian wedding open house. He describes his followers as his intimate friends, the friends of the bridegroom. We have been invited to participate more intimately in the joy of the wedding banquet, which is a figure of the boundless happiness of the Kingdom of Heaven.

On many occasions Our Lord honoured his followers by describing them as his friends. In the discourse at the Last Supper he tells them, in tones of endearing simplicity and sincerity:

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you ... I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.

Our Lord offers himself as an example of genuine and unreserved friendship, attracting everybody with great tenderness and affection. As Saint Bernard puts it so well, at that moment when gathered with the apostles at the Last Supper:

He allowed all the tenderness of his heart to escape; He opened his soul completely and from it there arose a most fragrant perfume, the perfume of a beautiful soul, of a generous and noble heart. And he became a faithful and self-effacing friend to all."

From Jesus' friendship there came that power of attraction that Saint Jerome compared to that of a powerful magnet.

So when Jesus refers to the new patch for a new garment and new wine for the new wine skins it is helpful to understand this in relation to this theme of God's friendship. It is this that Jesus was revealing about our relationship to God that was previously left unrevealed. Jesus came to announce that he call us his friends, friends of the bride-groom, who is inviting us to share every day in the Mass a foretaste of the wedding banquet we will fully share in heaven. At this

¹ Barclay, W. (2001). *The Gospel of Luke* (p. 79). Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox Press.

meal we are renewed in our friendship with Jesus and are renewed in our friendship with others.

As we grow in our friendship with Jesus the bridegroom we will take to heart these words from Sirach 6:16

***Faithful friends are life-saving medicine;
and those who fear the Lord will find them.***

Jesus our friend is truly life- saving medicine. Those who know his friendship in turn are known for their friendship towards others.

Friendship requires us to help our friends. If you discover some defect in your friend, correct him privately ... Corrections do a lot of good and are more valuable than a dumb friendship, which stands silently by, watching the friend drown.

Friendship has to be persevering: We shouldn't change our friends the way children do, who allow themselves to be tossed about by the fickle motions of sentimentality. I will not be ashamed to protect a friend. Don't abandon him in his hour of need, don't forget him, don't deny him your affection, because friendship is the mainstay of life. Let us carry one another's burdens, as the Apostle tells us.

If a man's prosperity benefits all his friends, why shouldn't he count on their help in moments of adversity? Let us help our friend with our counsels, let us unite our efforts to his, let us share his afflictions. And when the occasion arises, let us put up with great sacrifices out of loyalty to our friend. We may perhaps have to face antagonisms to defend the cause of an innocent friend, and be prepared to receive insults when we try to reply and rebut those who attack and accuse him. As Saint Ambrose observed:

In adversity true friendship is tested, because in prosperity everybody appears faithful.

Sharing in the friendship of the bridegroom is the new wine put into new wineskins. It is the new patch for the new garment of grace. For as Sirach 6 also says:

***Faithful friends are beyond price;
no amount can balance their worth.²***

We have such a friend in Jesus. May our friends discover that we too are this kind of friend, faithful beyond price.

² *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition.* (1993). (Sir 6:15). Washington, DC: National Council of Churches of Christ.