

Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time A - One Party We don't Want To Miss. Be prepared for the invitation.

October 11, 2020

This is the Thanksgiving weekend in Canada. Canada's Thanksgiving is on the second Monday in October and is a national holiday. It began as a day of giving thanks and sacrifice for the blessings of the harvest and of the preceding year. Its historical roots is in religious and cultural traditions. The centrepiece of contemporary Thanksgiving is a large meal, generally centred on a large roasted turkey, served with a variety of side dishes which vary from traditional dishes such as mashed potatoes, stuffing, and cranberry sauce, to ones that reflect regional or cultural heritage. Thanksgiving dinner is the largest family get together eating event. **This Sunday's readings remind us that Heaven also awaits us for a party. Everybody has to prepare for the party if we don't want to miss out on the fun.**

In the first reading (Isaiah 25:6-10A). **Isaiah describes our future as the ultimate party** where shadows and tears are banished, and there's only room for celebration. **Everyone, "all peoples," are invited to this celebration. No expense is spared on the food and the wine.** It's the time to forget worries and leave the tears behind. **The Lord is the life of the party on a deeper level than we could imagine.**

In the second reading (Philippines 4:12-14, 19-20), **St. Paul reminds us that moments of famine help us appreciate even more the moments of feast.** If you want just one list of all the ups and downs of St. Paul's missions, just read 2 Corinthians 11:21-33: prisons, beatings, shipwrecks, **"in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure."** The Philippians were worried about his hardship, but St. Paul responds that he can live in feast or famine because it is the Lord who strengthens him. **St. Paul assures them that the Lord will provide for them whatever they need as well.**

In the Gospel (Matthew 22:1-14), **the wedding feast reminds us of Heaven, but also that although everyone is invited to the party, some, in the end, will not be found worthy to participate in it, and some won't want to participate in it at all.** Some had already been invited to the feast because they had a closer relationship with the king. But these invitees gave excuses not to come. They were merely indifferent and uninterested which showed what they thought of their king, both as their ruler and as their friend. Abandoned by his friends, the king invited other members of his kingdom, but not on the basis of friendship, just by a benevolence a king owed his people. In the end, he also invited his subjects who were complete strangers to him, perhaps people who are not of his kingdom at all. They benefited from the great dinner, but they could not take the place of those the king wanted to partake of it, his invitees, those he wanted to acknowledge as his friends.

If this parable speaks to us of Heaven, it's also a reminder that God is merciful and good, but in the end, we have to do our part, even just a little, if we want to be saved. Salvation is not automatic. The man with no wedding garment had no excuse he could offer the king when asked why he was not prepared, and if the king was displeased, it means something was expected of that man that he didn't do. That wedding garment symbolizes having done something to partake and appreciate the marriage feast. This poor man shows no signs of celebration whatsoever. Maybe he represents the Christians who go through the motions all their life but never actually seek to help themselves to get to Heaven. We have to give Our Lord something to work with. Our "wedding garment" should be a life in the footsteps of Christ and we must ask ourselves how we are living that life. **The life of the party not only enjoys himself but helps others to enjoy the party as well.** If we cast God the Father as the host of the party, Our Lord is the loving Son who personally extends the invitation as a sign of respect

for the invitee. Our Lord doesn't just stop there. As St. Paul reminds us, Our Lord is the life of the party: ***"My God will fully supply whatever you need, in accord with his glorious riches in Christ Jesus."***

This week Saturday, the church will celebrate the feast of St. Ignatius of Antioch who lived about 1,500 years before the Jesuit founder, St. Ignatius of Loyola. He is one of the early Fathers of the Christian Church. He was bishop of Antioch in Syria, the largest Roman city outside of Rome. Antioch became one of the early centres of Christianity after the Christians were driven from Jerusalem. In fact, it was at Antioch that the followers of Jesus were called Christians for the first time. In his teachings, Ignatius spoke about the sacred and human dimensions of the Church. He wrote about bishops and priests, and about the holiness of matrimony. Even though the Christian Church at Antioch was probably larger than the Church in Rome, he spoke about the pre-eminence of Rome, because Peter went to Rome and died there, giving to his successors the charisma of the leader of the Apostles. Ignatius gave witness to Christ not just by what he wrote, but by dying as a martyr. When Emperor Domitian began persecuting the Christians, Ignatius wrote that they should remain strong in their witness to Jesus. They should become martyrs. His time came when he was brought before the Romans at Antioch, then condemned to death in the Flavian Amphitheater in Rome, the Colosseum. On the way to Rome, he wrote: **"I am the wheat of God. I must be ground by the teeth of the lions into flour. I must become the pure bread of Christ."** He died at Rome as a true bishop and martyr. **St. Ignatius of Antioch lived his Christianity. In the words of the Early Church, he was clothed in the Lord.** In his case, that garment was the white alb that martyrs wore when they entered the Colosseum to meet the wild beasts.

In our case, the garment of the Lord is not as dramatic, but it is still a garment of witnessing to the presence of Christ. The garment might be a dress or shirt that was soiled when we cared for others. Wearing our Christianity is a solution to the problem of polarization in our society. When we identify ourselves first as Christians rather than as members of this or that political party, then our primary mode of action will be to treat others with the kindness of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone is the solution to all our society's needs. If we really want to heal our country's ills, we need to wear the garment of the Lord. **Today let us pray for an active Christianity. May we truly put on Christ, first in our homes, among God's people, and in our world. Like Ignatius of Antioch, may we live and die wearing the wedding garment of Christ.**