

## 28<sup>th</sup> Sunday – Year A

Suppose you were at home and the door bell rang. You go to the door and look out the window and see there's a man in a suit standing there, holding a microphone. Behind him is a camera man, and next to him is a woman holding a large, poster-sized check with your name on it.

The check says it's from "Publisher's Clearing House" and the man looks a lot like Ed Mc Mahon. The amount written on the check is One Million Dollars.

What would you do?

I think I would overcome my skepticism just this once and open the door to what this all was about.

When Jesus' first hearers of this parable heard that there had been an invitation to the wedding banquet of the king's son, they knew what a big occasion it would be, and that the list of invitees would be very select.

That someone would turn down such an invitation would have been beyond what they could even imagine. I'm sure the thought ran through their minds, "If I had been invited, you'd better bet I would go!"

Imagine his hearers' surprise when the story continues past the part about the king taking revenge on those who mistreated and killed his

## 28<sup>th</sup> Sunday – Year A

servants to the part where the king insists that the wedding feast will continue in any case. The son deserves the celebration.

The first invitation list gets pitched and the servants are instructed to go and invite whomever. Jesus first hearers are justified in believing that they will get a chance to attend, after all.

If we know even a little about the history of salvation it's easy to detect that the story is an allegory for how things really unfolded. The king, God, did invite a certain guest list of people to the wedding feast of his son, and they turned him down. And, in fact, their refusal did result in the loss of the city of Jerusalem, which was overrun by the Romans a few decades later.

And by the time Matthew was writing things down in his Gospel, it was clear that the invitation was being extended and taken up and accepted by a whole other group of people, the Gentiles. The banquet hall was filling up, after all.

You may have noticed that, at that point in the story, there's a shift in focus. It becomes about the proper dress that a person ought to wear at a wedding feast.

And it can seem kind of odd that people coming in from the street (highways and byways in another

## 28<sup>th</sup> Sunday – Year A

translation) would already just happen to be dressed for a wedding.

We have to be careful about reading the story's chronology too closely, given that it is an allegory, and instead focus what point is being made.

One thing that does not change, whether it was for the original invitees or the ones who were invited later, is that there are expectations that come with the invitation.

It requires a proper response. The wedding garment comes to represent the response of the Christian person to the invitation coming from God to enter the wedding feast.

St. Paul uses the image of “clothing ourselves with good works and faithful discipleship. The baptized “put on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 13:14) and “have clothed themselves with Christ” (Gal. 3:27); the Colossians are encouraged to clothe themselves with virtues, and above all “with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony (Col. 3:12-14).

The person who is called to task does not have an answer to the question, 'My friend, how is it that you came in here without a wedding garment?'

That may be the worst response. Not having an

## 28<sup>th</sup> Sunday – Year A

answer. We don't know what would have happened if the person would have responded with, "I don't have a wedding garment. or "I didn't have time to go home and get it, or simply "Please forgive me."

The silence would seem to indicate that no effort was made.

That sort of behavior does not fit in with what happens at a wedding feast. We are supposed to be ready to participate, to be engaged in what is going on around us.

In the tradition, the lack of a wedding garment has been compared to the lack of a response to the grace that comes with God's invitation. For the church Fathers it had to do with having nothing to show for the fact that a person claimed the title of Christian—no good works, no expression of gratitude for the good he or she had received, not even sorrow for having squandered the gift that had been given.

What does a wedding garment look like? It should have elements of all that. It should look like it belongs at the wedding feast of the Son. There's a lot of individual creativity that can go into constructing the garment, but the materials are a given.

We have received the invitation. We are on the

## 28<sup>th</sup> Sunday – Year A

way to the feast. We also have time to check ourselves to see whether our “garment” will pass muster. We do not want to arrive and face the question of how we are dressed only to have nothing to say.