

Homily - Sunday, October 12, 2008

Twenty-eighth Sunday - Ordinary Time

Pre-introduction

First a word about the apparent unfairness at the end of today's Gospel about the wedding feast. It seems unjust that a person, invited off the street, should be condemned for not having the proper clothing at the banquet. When I studied Sacred Scripture, I remember an explanation of this curious twist in Jesus' parable which held that the host of such a festive gathering was expected to provide appropriate attire for his guests; that indeed there was a room set aside for people to avail themselves of celebratory outer garments. Thus the person who ignored this gesture of welcome and hospitality, as did the person in this story, was directly insulting his/her host and therefore would be shut out of the festivities.

Introduction

This parable of the wedding feast can be read on at least two levels. First, the traditional take on the story challenges us to avail ourselves of God's grace and invitation to live a good life and participate in the Reign of God here and hereafter. This is a perfectly legitimate and well understood reading.

A second level of understanding this parable is more on a societal plane: the invitation to participate in and celebrate our human and faith communities. This, too, is an entirely acceptable understanding of Jesus' lesson.

I

This second reading of today's Gospel supports and underscores this week's pre-election theme taken from Catholic Social Teaching: Family, Community and Participation. We are encouraged by the Bishops of the United States to look at the candidates for public office in light of the policies which they will choose in support of family, community and citizens' participation in working for the common good.

II

The Gospel we just heard also seems entirely relevant as a reflection following last week's continuing and ever-graver economic news. There is surely much to worry about; to name just a few:

-loss of security, especially for people in vulnerable employment situations

-the plight of elderly people whose savings are eroding

-the young, who wonder if they will be able to finance their education

III

However, this economic crisis can have a very positive effect, if looked at in the light of today's Gospel and its call to participation in community.

It may be a moment for us Americans to step back from the heresy of individualism and appreciate what we have, for example, here at Our Lady Queen of Peace community.

It may be a graced opportunity to rededicate ourselves to seeking the common good.

It may be a gift of God in disguise, helping us to care for the most vulnerable among us - those most affected by an economic collapse.

Conclusion

These are just a few thoughts on a beautiful October Sunday at a time when the world around us seems to be in the throes of an earthquake.

Let me conclude with a story from the years I spent in Peru, a story which I believe sums up beautifully what I have tried to say here.

I found myself on one occasion in the Andean highlands of Peru in a place called Yanaoca. It was a remote village populated by indigenous folk and I was visiting a friend of mine, a sister, who worked there. My visit stretched over a weekend and the people asked if I would celebrate Sunday Mass with them, as Yanaoca had no resident priest.

When the community leaders gathered to plan the liturgy that Sunday morning, they ran into a huge problem. One of the readings for the day came from the 17th Chapter of the Prophet Jeremias, where one reads about the tree planted near "living water" which flourishes and bears fruit abundantly. It was a clear reference to people who place themselves near the waters of God's grace and how they flourish.

The problem was that a serious drought had affected that region of Peru for many months and there was a real possibility that the crops of these subsistence farmers would be lost and hunger, even famine, would ensue. How then to reconcile the reading from Jeremias with the actual situation?

After a very long time, as so often happens, the community, guided by a little person over in one corner, agreed that the call of God's word that day was for them to be living waters for one another. That is, those who salvaged some of their harvest would have to share

the little they retrieved with those who lost everything. And that was their message that day.

This story seems entirely appropriate and applicable to our situation in the light of the Gospel we have heard today.