

October 11, 2020 St. Augustine/Crowley Center 11:30 a.m.

Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Throughout these nearly 8 months of living in the grip of this worldwide pandemic, we all have had to make enormous adjustments to our lifestyles, and have experienced major changes to how normal activities take place, or in many cases, don't take place. In addition to major shifts in how we are trying to continue with life's essential activities, such as work, school, and the practice of our Faith, with a combination of in-person and virtual mediums, many of life's (what we might call) "extracurricular", recreational, or social activities have either been cancelled, rescheduled, or postponed indefinitely.

One of life's special events that has been greatly impacted during all this time has been the normally happy occasions of Weddings. I would imagine that all of us here probably know someone in our own relationships, perhaps members of our own families, whose weddings have had to be rescheduled, or greatly downsized, due to the restrictions on how many people can be invited, and in what ways those who are invited can be together, even for something as wonderful as the marriage of two people we know and love.

Today's Readings from God's Holy Word for this 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time are all about extending Invitations to wonderful Banquets, or Wedding Feasts. That's what we heard Isaiah proclaiming in the First Reading: the Lord of Hosts provides not only "*a feast of rich foods and choice wines*" for all people and all nations; but also, the Lord God will "*wipe the tears away from every face*"; and even "*destroy death forever.*"! That was God's original Plan, and it remains God's unchanging Hope! But down thru the ages, over and over again, people refused God's invitation, and worked against His Plan.

And of course, as we know, that is why----"*in the fullness of time*"---God sent His only-begotten Son into the world to be God's Word in the Flesh, and to teach the Good News of God's unconditional Love to all human beings, as they make their way in this human world, hoping that they will do so as People of Faith, in union with God and with one another. It had become very clear to Jesus that many people were not open to listening to God's Word even from Him; all were being invited, but very few were responding.

And so Jesus told the Parable we just heard in today's Gospel passage. Once again, He was focused on speaking to the chief priests and the elders of the

people as a way, not only to remind them of God's "open invitation" to be His Faithful People, but also as a way of teaching them what the Kingdom of Heaven was like.

We know the Parable well: a King was throwing a Wedding Feast for his son, and sent out invitations to all the citizens to attend. Unfortunately, no one responded. So, he sent out another round of invitations. This time, some people made up excuses as to why they couldn't be there; while others actually resorted to abusing and killing the King's messengers who were trying to deliver the invitations. Much like the Parable we heard in last Sunday's Gospel where the Tenant Farmers rejected the Vineyard Owner's representatives, and even his Son by killing him, so in today's Parable, Jesus is warning the People and the Leaders what it could mean for them if they ignore, and even reject, God's invitation of Love.

Once more in this Parable, the fact that the King "*became enraged, destroyed those murderers and burned their city*", reflected the sinful human actions Jesus was seeing in them; those were the very practices and choices which Jesus had come to challenge and to transform. That's not the way Jesus was teaching them to act; and it's quite clear that is not the way God deals with us. God's invitation remains open to us, even when we ignore Him; or even reject Him.

Our lives have certainly been impacted by this awful Pandemic; it clearly has interrupted our normal activities, and has kept us from being able to do what we would normally be doing, even in the essential aspects of our daily activities, our family life, and our spiritual lives. Here in our Diocese, and in most other Dioceses in our country and throughout the world, there continues to be in place a general dispensation from the sacred obligation we have to come to Mass each week. But for those who are able, healthy, and for whom the dispensation doesn't apply--- are they coming to Mass?; or has there been a certain complacency take over, keeping us from acknowledging what should be our inner sense of obligation to practice our Faith, to come to Mass because we realize our need to give our worship to God, and to receive the precious Gift of the Eucharist?

But even before the Pandemic, we're all too aware that between 60% and 70% of Catholics, in our Diocese and across the country, were already not coming to Mass. And census data reveals that approximately 50% of the people living in the 9 counties of our Diocese profess no particular religious affiliation at all! I hope

that information is troubling to those of us who are trying to live as People of Faith, and in particular as faithful Catholic followers of Jesus.

God consistently invites; but as we see in our own life circumstances, many people passively ignore God; some people actively reject God's invitation. The people in Jesus' Parable had a variety of reasons why they weren't coming---excuses, really; some had to go to their farm; others had to take care of their business; still others just honestly said, in effect, "I'm not interested!"

I wonder what the reasons are that people give today for why they have no time in their lives for God, or why they are simply not interested in living according to God's ways. And rather than pointing fingers at others, perhaps today is a good time to ask ourselves how interested are we in the ways of God in my life? Are we totally committed to living as people who are "on fire" with our Love for God, or are we more focused on doing the minimum required of me? How is it that we can make time and have the energy to do all the things that really interest, or excite, us; but have little, to no time, for the practice of our Faith?

On Friday evening, and a good bit of yesterday, I was privileged to participate in the National "Quinto Encuentro", that is the "5th "Encounter", which is a national meeting of Leaders among Hispanic Catholics in the United States. The theme of this "Encounter" was *"Missionary Disciples: Witnesses of God's Love"*. This, of course, was a virtual meeting of more than 3,000 leaders---bishops, priests, religious and lay women and men---representing more than 100 dioceses in the United States. Speakers included our Apostolic Nuncio, the Pope's representative here in the U.S., Archbishop Christophe Pierre, and many other national speakers. But what was most impressive of all to me was the virtual meeting I was able to participate in with our own diocesan delegation of 23 people---priests, religious and lay leaders, 13 of whom are young adults between the ages of 18 and 36. What was so inspiring to me was how strong their Faith is, and how committed they are to living their Faith in the midst of all the other struggles and challenges that they are facing; how much they love Jesus; how devoted they are to having Faith guide them in all aspects of their lives.

That's what Jesus has come to do for all of us---to show us the path to be able to live in this world, in the midst of all the struggles and challenges we're all facing, while keeping our hearts and our hopes set on the life of the world to come. Jesus continuously invites us to follow Him, the Light of the World, and to

resist the overwhelming forces all around us to be drawn into the Darkness of individualism, division, and violence toward others. Or to use the theme of the Quinto Encuentro, Jesus invites us to be *“Witnesses to God’s Love in the world”*.

Jesus didn’t just teach us about God’s Love; He didn’t just tell us Parables about what the Kingdom of Heaven was like. No, Jesus demonstrated what Saving/Sacrificial Love is by giving Himself completely thru His suffering, death, and Resurrection, which has conquered sin and death forever. That’s the Good News of the Gospel. That’s the Good News that gives us the reason to live our lives with Hope. That’s the Good News that Jesus invites us to hear, and respond to, in our lives as *“Witnesses to God’s unconditional Love”*.

So, what is our response? What could possibly be our reason, or excuse, to say “No” to what Jesus offers us? How do those who consciously choose to refuse Jesus’ invitation to receive Him in the precious Gift of the Eucharist in favor of “going to the farm” or “taking care of our business”, or whatever other reasons they might have justify their choices?

The second half of today’s Parable told of how the King went out to the “highways and byways”, inviting any and all to the Wedding Feast, bringing together *“the bad and the good alike”*. And of course, that’s US; our gathering together is not just for “saints”; in fact, we know that we’re all sinners, but we hope “saints in the making”, who are in need of God’s love and mercy. While the aspect of this Parable about the one person who was there without a “wedding garment” and was subsequently thrown out might be a challenge for us to comprehend, we do know that our Baptism *“puts on”* the *“wedding garment”* of a new Life in Christ. So, being a part of the Life Christ invites us to do more than just “show up”; it requires some effort of “living” our Faith through deeds of charity, and acts of Christ-like love.

While saying “Yes” to God’s invitation is certainly challenging, we can be assured that we’re not just on our own. That’s why coming to Mass, receiving the Sacraments, and practicing our Faith are so important, because that’s how we receive the Graces and spiritual strength that we all need. That’s what St. Paul meant in today’s Second Reading, *“I can do all things in Him Who strengthens me.”* We’re not on our own; we’re accompanied by one another, and we’re united by a strong and passionate Love for Jesus, which motivates us to live our lives as joyful disciples and “witnesses of God’s Love”.

Yesterday in Rome, Carlo Acutis was beatified, the last step before being declared a Saint of the Church. Carlo died of leukemia at the age of 15 just 14 years ago in 2006 in Milan. But in his young life, he had a tremendous love for Jesus, and used his skills on the internet to share his great love for the Eucharist. In every way, he was a typical teenager, who loved "Playstation" and was known as a "Gamer"; but he loved Jesus more. He was the one who motivated his parents, who were not strong Catholics, to come back to Mass; along with so many others whom he influenced. He developed a ministry to the internet, encouraging devotion to the Holy Eucharist. I say that because Carlo is a powerful, modern-day example to ALL of us who are "saints" in the making. We can try to get by doing just the minimum that's required of us, and keeping our Faith to ourselves; or, we can let our Love for Jesus be shown to all those in our lives. That's what it means to be "*witnesses*" to God's amazing Love---to let the Light of our Faith shine in this world that is filled with such darkness.

But be assured, we do not need to do this on our own. Again as St. Paul reminds us today: "*My God will fully supply whatever you need in accord with his glorious riches in Christ Jesus. To our God and Father, glory forever and ever. Amen.*"