

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Today's parable, like last week's parable, begins with a beautiful opening image: a glorious wedding banquet. Nor is it just any wedding banquet; it's a royal wedding.

This beautiful opening image is not unlike the opening image at the beginning of the book of Genesis, the wonderful gift of creation. But, like so many stories in the Bible, something goes wrong - something goes horribly wrong. That which begins with an invitation to a glorious wedding banquet ends with the massacre of the king's messengers and the destruction of the perpetrators and their city.

The story of sin is not a new one. The havoc it creates is clearly seen throughout human history, its effects are a daily burden on our society and its impact is deeply felt on each and every person. We have only to turn on the news at the end of each day and ask ourselves, "How did it go wrong? Why is there so much pain, hatred and suffering among us?" And we may join in with The Black-eyed Peas refrain: "Where is the love?"

We often think it's a simple matter of good and bad, or even good vs bad. But that isn't the primary distinction that is emphasized in today's parable. Notice, at the end, both good and bad were gathered; their state of life is not as important as their openness to the invitation. The parable is clear in this, as long as we are open to God's voice, and have donned a wedding garment as a sign of our openness, God makes good the bad, and makes the good better.

Religion is not so much a matter of how good we are, lest we become conceited and begin to judge our neighbours, but how open we are to God's voice. It is his invitation to something great and glorious, and our openness to him, that transmits the grace to transform us.

What about those who are closed to God's transformative work in their lives, those who react violently to any perceived interference with their opinions, dealings or agendas, those who may even stand in judgment over others? Their fate seems rather harsh. And, yet, time and time again throughout history, as well as in numerous stories in the Bible, the end is clear. We are the authors of our own destruction. The tragedies we write are but our own.

The pillaging and destruction of the city was part of Israel's history, when the northern ten tribes and their capital, Samaria, fell to the Assyrians and, later, the capital of Judah (Jerusalem) fell to the Babylonians. Jesus' parable also points to Jerusalem's second destruction at the hands of the Romans forty years after Jesus' Passion, Death and Resurrection.

Is it any wonder that Jesus mourns upon seeing Jerusalem? He came to invite her as his spouse into the ways of peace, but she chooses the way of obstinacy and rebellion.

Religion is not so much about good and bad, or how good someone is in comparison to someone else. Our faith is all about how open and ready we are to God's invitation and the grace he has made available to us through Jesus Christ our Lord.