

Sermon for the Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

'For many are called, but few are chosen.'

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'Rejoice in the Lord always: and again, I say, rejoice.' 'For the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son.'

This is the wedding feast of the Incarnation, the wedding of the divine nature with the human through the Virgin 'full of grace'. And what is a wedding but the occasion for the greatest joy? *'The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.'* *'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with men.'*

'And the King sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast,' For in the ages prior to that 'birth forever blessed' God had called to his people by the words of the prophets *to draw near unto the Lord while he may be found.* Century upon century did he raise up servants, then to call Israel to repentance, then to glorify them with His divine presence *in the wedding of the marriage Feast of the Lamb in his Kingdom.* For indeed, the entire Old Testament is as a millennia long preparation for that day when the human nature would call out to the divine *'let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth'* when *'the virgin would conceive, and give birth.'*

And yet, the parable continues, *'they would not come.'* For *they hardened their hearts.* Indeed, *they were a stiff necked people.* Yet *the mercy of the Lord endures forever.* And so God, in His forbearance and longsuffering patience did not punish them for their ignorance, *'that none should be lost, but that all should come to a knowledge of the truth.'*

Again he sent other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, "See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast."' See now the fullness of time has

passed and Holy Mary brought forth her firstborn son and laid him in a manger. God the Father again sends out servants to call His people to rejoice in the Lord for the Incarnation of His Son. To Zacharias and Joseph sent He Gabriel. To the Shepherds He sent His heavenly host to declare unto them 'good tidings of great joy.' To Herod and all Jerusalem God sent the magi, gentiles to announce to the Jews that the time of their waiting was complete, that the Messiah had come, God taking on flesh.

And what should the Jews and their leaders have said upon hearing this news? They should have confessed those words given to them by the prophet Isaiah: *'Lo this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.'*

But what was their response? *'Herod the king had heard these things, and was greatly troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.'* *'And the chief priests and the scribes and the elders of the people [...]consulted together, that they might take Jesus by deceit and kill him.'* *'And from that time on, the Scribes and Pharisees sought an opportunity against him.'*

So they seized his servant, treated him shamefully, and killed him. They crucified the Lord of Glory.

Now we see the Passion of our Lord in this servant, treated shamefully, and killed. For the Son of God is the servant of the Father, even as in last week's parable, having sent servant after servant, the master sends his Son as the greatest of his servants. So the suffering servant and the Son are one; and now between the last parable, and this parable, they have both been killed. The father invites: *'My oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered.'* The Lord Jesus declares *'It is finished.'* *'Everything is ready.'*

'Then he said to his servants,' that is, to the holy Apostles, *'The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.'* That is, *'go unto all nations, baptizing, and teaching them all that I have commanded.'* *And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. Through the Apostle's ministry and the office of the keys, through the proclamation of God's word and the announcement of His divine grace and calling, we, who are evil, yet now also good, being justified by grace, are gathered*

into the Church of God. *So the wedding hall was filled with guests.*

You have heard the rest of the parable. Now I ask you a question, there is the father, there is the wedding, there are the guests, but where is the Son?

I told you at the beginning, this wedding is the feast of the Incarnation, the taking up of human nature into the divine Son of God.

Where is the Son in this parable? He is in the wedding garment, for the garment is His righteousness by which we are covered and made just before the judgement seat of God, made worthy of the glory of the Father's feast. By this covering, we receive everything that is Christ's: we receive His glory, His righteousness, His justice, His grace, His forgiveness, even as a bride receives all that is her husband's. Where is the Son in the parable? He is laid over every wedding guest, He is united to every one of you in faith through the saving font of Baptism. He covers every casket.' Christ Himself is the wedding garment whom we have put on, even as it is written: *'You are all now God's children through faith in Christ Jesus, for as many of you as have been baptized have put on Christ.'*

But if it is the case that the bride receives all that is the bridegrooms in marriage, is it not also true that the bridegroom receives all that is the brides?

So Christ did receive all that was ours, as our scape-goat, our sin bearer. *He became sin for us*, receiving in Himself the manifold evils which plague all fallen human existence. And, *being made man*, He endured all that was due to man, yet *without sin*. This is the true meaning of the Incarnation, in celebration of which the Father throws a feast. Christ, being made man, was born as we are. Christ, being made man, *was tempted as we are*. Christ, being made man, suffered that debt which was owed by man; with blood did He pay, and with agony did He reckon the accounts. *'He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him.'*

Again I ask, where is the Son in this parable? *'When the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment.* Here we see Christ who has become man, has given us the garment of His righteousness, for it is written: *'if anyone ask for your tunic, let him have your cloak also.* And in giving us His cloak of innocence, He then put on the garment of our guilt. The clothing not of a wedding, but of eternal divorce. *'And the king said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless.'* For *'as*

a lamb to the slaughter, he opened not his mouth.'

'Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot' Even as it is written of Isaac 'Abraham bound his son.' Even as it was commanded of the lambs of sacrifice. 'And they cast him into the outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth.' Thus do we confess of our Lord who was made man, who was made sin, *'he descended into hell.'*

In His descent into hell, the Incarnation of the Lord is made complete, for everything that we owed, He suffered, even the death of hell.

But it is written: *'Many are called, but few are chosen.'* Indeed, few are chosen, for One is chosen, Our Lord, the Christ, who is victorious over death and hell. See His great victory, He enters bound, in weakness and frailty, into the outer darkness, there to destroy death, there to sack hell, even as we feast, wrapped in the garments of His merit and righteous love.

For the Wedding Feast of the Incarnation ends with the Wedding Feast of the Resurrection, where Jesus, the new Adam, being alone found just in the sight of the Father, is raised from death and chosen to be God's own, and all who believe in Christ with Him and in Him. Thus we are brought to the Father and to His feast in the flesh of Christ, guarded by the robe of His righteousness. For Our champion, Jesus, the Christ, has *'swallowed up death in his victory' and has made our joy complete.* Therefore, *the Lord of hosts makes unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines of the lees.* Our Savior Jesus brings to us *'fat things full of marrow, and wine well refined.'*

Declare, therefore, O Guests of the Wedding Feast of the King of the Universe, declare: *'This is our God; we have waited for him, and he has saved us. We will be glad, and rejoice in his salvation'*

'Rejoice in the Lord always; and again, I say, rejoice.'

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