

HOMILY for 28th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME – Year A

This Sunday's Gospel tells us the story of a wedding feast. Reflecting on that, I'm reminded of this cute story that I'd like to share with you.

A family crossing the US-Mexico border for the first time was asked by the customs agent, "What is the purpose of your visit?"

"We're going to a wedding," the mother replied.

"Are you carrying any weapons? Any knives or guns?" the agent asked.

"No," the mother answered, stunned. "It's not that kind of wedding, sir!"

This Sunday's Gospel shares with us a story of a king who wants to invite a bunch of guests to a wedding banquet for his son. But, here is their response: "...He [the king] dispatched his servants to summon the invited guests to the wedding, but they refused to come. A second time he sent other servants, saying: 'Tell those who were invited, see, I have my dinner prepared! My bullocks & corn-fed cattle are killed; everything is ready. Come to the feast.' Some ignored the invitation & went their way, one to his farm, another to his business. The rest laid hold of his servants, insulted them, & killed them." So, why did those guests respond that way? What do you think make them turn down such an honorable & happy event?

I let you figure out their reasons for turning down the invitation to the royal wedding banquet. I don't know about you, but I would never turn down such a great opportunity to meet new people and have wonderful time, especially enjoying some good food! First of all, it's FREE & costs us NOTHING! Second, it's a great honor for us to be invited to the royal banquet. It's a chance of a lifetime for a lowly citizen like us to be welcomed at that important event among the social elites. Finally, it's a fun & exciting event, not like a boring fund-raising event. Besides, there will be a lot of delicious foods & fabulous drinks for us to enjoy. It would be absolutely crazy for us not to attend that banquet. We should rsvp immediately to reserve our seats & attend it. Personally I'd make sure to be there in person even if I'll have to drag my sick body to it. For I want to give honor to the king who cared about me enough to invite me to his family banquet. Besides, I don't want to miss out on this chance of a lifetime to be a part of such an awesome event.

This banquet invitation reminds me of a similar invitation that I received from a relative to his wedding some years ago. I left Viet Nam when this cousin was in middle school. His family eventually came to America through an immigration program called Orderly Departure Program (ODP) because their father was in the South Vietnamese army fighting with the American in the Viet Nam War. So, the wedding of my cousin would be a perfect family reunion for me to see him & his family again. Besides, he would be honored to have me preside at his wedding & pray for him & his bride at their new beginning. Those were wonderful reasons for me to accept his invitation to the wedding. But, being a pastor of a church, I had lots of responsibilities along with some personal appointments that I would need to change before I could go to that event. Moreover, it's close to twenty-four hours drive for me from Grand Rapids to Oklahoma City. Additionally, there are lots of tornadoes in that part of the country. Those were some excuses that I could use to back out of this wedding invitation like the invited guests did in today's Gospel. But, if I do that, I would put my needs before my cousin's, my happiness before his. I also would miss out on a chance of a lifetime to share in the joyous day of his life & see his family again. So, I decided to make it to the wedding even if I had to drag myself there. I was

honored to preside at my cousin's wedding & had a wonderful time to see his whole family again. More importantly, I was able to bring my parents to that family re-union & let them share in that happy occasion with my cousin as well.

As you can see, I decided to attend that wedding in Oklahoma City because I wanted to show love & respect to my cousin. Besides, it was a great family re-union & a wonderful opportunity for me to share in that joyful occasion. Surely, his children & grandchildren would reminisce about that awesome event in future years. So, I did not mind making some personal sacrifices to attend it & trying to be a part of it. Unfortunately, today's Gospel tells us how some people would take the invitation to the royal banquet as following, "...Some ignored the invitation & went away – one to his farm, another to his business. The rest laid hold of the servants, mistreated them, & hurt them." Believe it or not, that is very much the actual reaction of our society toward God & the spiritual world right now. People usually ignore God & God's invitation for them to attend the Heavenly Banquet. They don't show any love & respect for God by putting God's invitation before their own will. Instead, they put their worldly concerns & ambitions before God's plan of salvation. They could not see the honor & excitement of being invited to the Heavenly Banquet for Jesus God's beloved son. They did not realize the opportunity of seeing old friends & meeting new ones at this wonderful re-union. That is why they were quick to dismiss it & move on to do whatever they like. They did not put the interests of God who invited them before theirs & try to make sacrifices for it.

However, the people of God like us have one more reason to accept God's invitation to the Heavenly Banquet gladly. That reason is stated in today's First Reading as following, "On this mountain the Lord of hosts will provide for all peoples, a feast of rich food & choice wines, juicy rich food & pure, choice wines. On this mountain he will destroy the veil that veils all peoples, the web that is woven over all nations; he will destroy death forever. The Lord God will wipe away the tears from every face... On that day it will be said: 'Behold our God, to whom we looked to save us! ...Let us rejoice & be glad that he has saved us!'" So, apparently the Lord promised to the people of God to save them from their current miseries & give them a banquet feast with rich food & choice wines on the mountain of God. For the people of God back then, their miseries were slavery & the loss of their homeland. For us now, our miseries might be health problems, broken relationships, loss of loved ones, the lack of basic necessities, tragedies, loneliness, or hopelessness. The Lord promised to take away those miseries, including death for us & wipe away our tears at that banquet. That is another important reason for us to answer God's invitation & be a part of the Heavenly Banquet. That is why we Christians often view death as the way for us to participate fully in the Heavenly Banquet.

My dear brothers & sisters, what does the Heavenly Banquet mean to you? If you are invited to a royal banquet, what would you do? Would you ignore it & turn it down by doing something else? I hope you would do everything possible to take part in it & have a memorable experience of it for the rest of your life.