

HOMILY SUN 28-A (Homily 02)

“Wearing the Garment of Eternal Life”

(Isaiah 25:6-10a; Psalm 23; Philippians 4:10-14, 19-20; Matthew 22:1-14)

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A woman went to the wake for a neighbor’s wife. When she commented on the beautiful dress his late wife was wearing in the coffin, the husband said sadly that he had bought that very expensive dress for her years earlier. His wife had put it away for a special occasion and in the end had never worn it. She resisted his frequent encouragement for her to do so, as he was eager to see her wear it. She kept on saying that she was saving it for a very special occasion. Her funeral was now that special occasion.

We are called, by the readings today, to dress for eternal life and to live in the Kingdom of God now, through faith in Jesus and selfless service to others.

The poet Robert Frost once wrote, “Something there is that does not love a wall; that sends the groundswell under it.” He could have been speaking about humanity and our pernicious tendency to resist the very thing that we need the most, unconditional love and the Kingdom of God.

That is what Isaiah writes about in the first reading, almost as eloquently as Frost. There is a shroud, a sheet over all humanity he claims, that prevents people from being free, from responding to God’s love with faith and love. Isaiah does not elaborate about what that shroud and sheet is – he mentions only death, tears and disgrace.

That shroud could be for us today gangs and crime, rampant addictions and now apparently even super juice, few youth in church, religion and church the lowest priority in peoples’ lives, the scandal of sexual abuse in the church often mishandled, divisions in our communities, violence and murder, prejudice and racism, dictators clinging to power as in Libya, Eritrea and Syria at the cost of thousands of lives, abortion and euthanasia and family break-ups, etc., etc.; the list could go on. We are all too familiar with the sorry state of affairs in our world.

Yet in the light of all this, Isaiah is able to proclaim boldly and with great confidence that someday God will destroy that shroud, lift that sheet off the backs of humanity, and bring about a new world order, a new creation, a perfect society. This is what Isaiah is waiting for with so much faith that he can even invite us to be glad and rejoice, for this salvation is at hand. *The hand of the Lord rests on that*

*mountain*, Isaiah assures us.

In the gospel, we see that theophany predicted by Isaiah, not on a mountain, but unfolding before our eyes in so humble and ordinary a manner in the person of Jesus, that the proud Jewish religious authorities don't get it.

Jesus uses a wedding banquet as the image of the kingdom. The Father is God; the Son sent by the Father is Jesus and all are invited into this kingdom, to the banquet. Those first invited (symbolized by the Jewish religious leaders) refuse to come or respond negatively due to their unbelief and hypocrisy. That is the shroud and the sheet covering humanity, and especially the Jewish leaders.

In addressing this parable to the religious authorities who were resisting his teaching, Jesus is inserting a sharp caution for us not to rely on religiosity to justify ourselves. Just prayer and religious acts are not enough; our motivation must go beyond that. Our faith and love must be from the heart and place Jesus and his teachings as the top priority in our own lives, if we are to live in his reign.

The bride in the parable remains a mystery until this point. We come to realize that we are all meant to be the bride, to be married to the Son. The wedding garment is a desire, a commitment to change, to be united to Jesus, to do what Jesus would do, to live out our baptism in a life of service.

Someone who has an almost intuitive insight into the inner meaning of this parable is Jean Vanier, son of the former Governor General of Canada and founder of L'Arche Homes for the mentally challenged. In his latest book, *The Scandal of Service*, he writes:

Growth in Jesus' love is a long process that involves struggle. This struggle is not so much against disobeying moral laws and commandments, but the struggle to trust in Jesus' call, in his promises of love and his invitation to give our lives totally to him. It is the struggle to let the Holy Spirit take over our lives, guide and inspire us in all we do. It is a struggle to remain constantly open and faithful to the Holy Spirit on this new path of love.

In the second reading, we see that Paul's response to this invitation is what Jesus was looking for from the Jewish leaders, and a model for the world. Paul's faith in Jesus is so strong that he is at peace regardless of what is happening in his life, and can accept whatever comes. Paul is living out that statement of Isaiah to be glad and rejoice, We are invited to be like Paul, to put our complete trust in Jesus and to

live out his teachings, especially the Great Commandment to love God with our whole being, in prayer and worship, and to love all those in need around us as we would love ourselves, in loving, sincere compassion and service.

Fr. Frank, an Oblate missionary in B.C., has that Pauline quality about him. He shared with a group of Oblates one day how on Sunday he would spend the day visiting homes in his former mission, inviting people to come to the 5 pm Eucharist. In so doing he said he was following the First Nations tradition in that mission of inviting people to important events. When asked how many people would come after a day of such visiting, he replied none, if there was something else going on in the community. His answer to the next question, how he responded to that reality, was to say that he learned a long time earlier that his happiness did not depend on what happens around him. Sounds a bit like St. Paul, does it not?

The Eucharist that we celebrate now is a foretaste of the heavenly banquet, constantly calling us to respond more and more deeply to the invitation to participate in the wedding feast of the Lamb.

So let us renew within ourselves the desire to love God and marry the Son. Let us dress for eternal life and live in the Kingdom of God now, through faith in Jesus and selfless service to others.