

**Homily for October 13, 2002
28th Sunday in Ordinary Time C**

By Father Charles Bowes

**Isaiah 25:6-10a
Philippians 4:12-14, 19-20
Matthew 22:1-14**

To be part of God's kingdom remains ever a choice we can accept or refuse.

What was your reaction to the destruction of the Taliban government in Afghanistan and the disruption of the Al Qaeda? Were you gleeful? Relieved? Hopeful that the threat of death on our innocent civilians might be lessened? Well, that's pretty much how Saint Matthew's Christian community viewed the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish Temple: "At last, it's high time those who persecuted us are getting their comeuppance. Good riddance," they thought.

That's how this parable of the invited wedding guests has been viewed for centuries: as fuel for anti-Semitism. The guests who refuse to come are equated with the Jewish people who first heard the invitation of Jesus, refused to respond, and later persecuted the early Christians. The consequence of this rejection and persecution was the destruction of the Jewish Temple. Evil deeds beget God's wrath, and we Christians are just the ones to know what is and isn't evil, and apply the appropriate remedy, right?

Well, such a view was unfortunately part of the "blame game" as it was played out in the first century. Throughout biblical literature and church history, the problem of reconciling horrible suffering and God's providential care has often been dealt with by explaining suffering as divine punishment for

human sinfulness.

Saint Matthew's addition to the parable of a character lacking proper attire is a step toward rethinking the picture of a God who rejects one group to choose another. The story of the guest without the wedding garment shifts the meaning of the parable away from those who first refused the invitation to Matthew's own community. It shifts responsibility to us today.

It seems strange, doesn't it, that a fellow invited from the streets would suddenly be cast out because he wasn't appropriately dressed - what a dumb thing to expect from one in poverty! But in this story, clothing can represent identification with Jesus. The wedding garment suggests the good deeds or quality of life that a person is to show at the time of the grand accounting, the final judgment. In other words, St. Matthew's Christians are not to bask in malicious joy over the destruction of Jerusalem, but are to realize that, even though invited, they too are to be suitably garbed - clothed with works of justice and kindness.

And the same applies to us. All of us can thank God for the invitation to the eucharistic banquet given in baptism, foreshadowing the ultimate union with the saints in heaven. But we Catholics can also question our

willingness to join all too gleefully in the "blame game" - whether political, religious or personal. The ongoing season of shame in the church has funded this game, now vigorously played by all sides and often with a total lack of goodness and kindness. Unlike the man without a garment, we still have time - but you never know when the final invitation will come.

There is an old chestnut, still unfortunately heard, that the God of the Old Testament is a God of wrath, while Jesus proclaims a God of mercy. The truth is that God is a God of mercy and justice - shown in both the Old and the New Testaments.

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