

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Some of you may remember Msgr. Joe Gentili, a friend of mine, who helped us out some years back. Well, he is now the Pastor of Our Lady of Guadalupe in Buckingham, over near Doylestown. He recently told me how members of the Hospitality Committee heard that a new family had moved into one of the big, old homes, just outside Doylestown. Being very zealous about their ministry, they decided to visit the newcomers, welcome them to the neighborhood, and invite them to come to Church. When they got to the home they found it was a really large family with ten children. They had taken some cookies and brownies and watched as the children devoured them like they hadn't had a meal in a week. The Mother looked haggard and worn out. The Father told how, right after moving in, he had lost his job.

The whole Committee then met and decided they would buy new clothes for the family and a week's worth of groceries. The original members of the Committee then returned to the home and said, "We want you to know that you and your entire family are welcome at our church anytime. We brought you these gifts and hope that you find a warm welcome in our Church Family."

The following Sunday, the members of the Committee met after all the Masses and were disappointed that the family never showed up at any Mass. The chair of the Committee decided to stop by the home to find out what happened. As she arrived the family was just coming home in their new clothes. She said, "We were hoping to see you in Church today and really missed you. Would you mind if I asked why you didn't come?"

The Father spoke up. He said, "Well, we got up this morning intending to come. And we sure do appreciate your invitation and your generous gifts. But after we showered, shaved, and dressed, well, we looked so fine and proper we went to the Episcopal Church instead.

In light of this experience, I think I should call this message, "MANY ARE CALLED, BUT FEW CHOOSE TO COME!"

That is part of the message the Lord is conveying in this parable spoken to the chief priests and elders of the people, and, yes, to us as well. First we must recognize that we are not the original invitees to this Banquet. We are, rather, those found wandering in the streets, "the bad and good alike".

Oh, some of us think we are here because we deserve to be. Some think we are the good, righteous, holy people who have a right to share in this Eucharistic Banquet. After all, we've worked just as hard and we're just as tired as those lazy louts still lying in bed. We're here and not out playing golf, even though it's a great day for golf. You parents who struggled to get the kids up, washed, dressed, and in the car—surely you must think you

deserve some credit for being here. You've already put in a full day's work. You could have made all kinds of excuses. Doesn't all that effort count for anything?

Would you be angry at me if I suggest that you are missing the whole point of the Gospel, if you think you are here because you deserve to be?

Please allow me to explain with a little story about a man who fell into a deep well. After falling down the slimy shaft into the cold water, the man called for help, but no one came. His cry wasn't heard. So, then, he decided to try to climb out. Again and again he tried to inch up the slippery algae-covered brick, only to slide back into the water. His fingernails were bloodied from his attempts to get a grip in the cracks. He simply couldn't make it to the top before sliding back down. Despairing, he called out again.

A passerby heard his call and looked down into the well. He said, "I can't get you out of the well, but I can make it better for you. Have something to drink." So, he dropped a bottle of liquor down to the man who proceeded to drink it and get quite drunk. By then the well didn't seem so bad. However, after he slept off the effect of the alcohol, he realized he was still trapped in the well and miserable.

Again, he cried out, begging for help. This time a woman appeared. She looked down, shook her head, and said, "Well, I can't get you out of the well, but things could be much worse for you. You must accept your situation and make the best of it."

So the man in the well tried not to feel sorry for himself and to be grateful that he was alive, but it didn't work. He was still miserable and alone, and despair maintained its grip on him. So, he tried to climb out again. He had always been able to take care of himself. But, bloody, cold, and hungry now, he slid back into the water again. And he cried bitter tears.

Then, another man appeared above. "I can get you out of the well," he said, "but you must trust me. Do you?" The man in the well couldn't see how this man could get him out, but he said, "Yes, I'll trust you."

Then Jesus dropped into the well. The man climbed upon his shoulders, while Christ remained in the man's place.

This is not one man's story. It is the story of humanity. It is your story and my story. It is the story of the sinner. It is our story. To say that is not to demean us. It is to acknowledge that we are all in the same boat. Without Christ in our lives, we are lost to God, to each other, and to ourselves.

Last week I told the story of two young men I met in Boston the previous week when I was up there to officiate at my niece's wedding. The two young men were from Houston. I asked them how they had faired through the terrible Hurricane Irma.

I was surprised when one said to me, “That hurricane may have been the best thing that ever happened to Houston. All of a sudden we were all the same. It didn’t matter what language we spoke or if we were black or white or brown; rich or poor; republican or democrat; Muslim or Christian or Jew; we were all the same. We were all in the same boat. We all helped each other. People risked their lives for total strangers. We welcomed each other into our homes if we had one. Houston will be a better city and we are better people for what we’ve been through.”

In such circumstances, can’t you see how meaningless it is to consider who is deserving and who is not? All are poor. All are broken. All are in total need. That is our condition as we gather in the Presence of our God. That, my dear Sisters and Brothers, is who we are who have been invited to this Eucharistic Banquet.

This Mass is something like the wedding feast of the parable. We have been invited into the presence of the King of Kings; the Lord of Lords; the Savior upon whose shoulders we stand. The table is set. The candles are lit. We have greeted each other as friends. The music has welcomed us. There is a feeling of warmth and joyousness in this place. We have opened the Scriptures and are preparing to be fed the Bread of Life and the Sumptuous Wine of our Salvation. Our celebration has begun, and what a celebration it is! We are celebrating the King’s great love for His Son and His Bride, the Church.

We are not here because we deserve to be. We are here because of His gracious invitation.

Now, if you will, I ask you to turn your attention to the rather harsh and dark part of the parable—“When the king came in to meet the guests, he saw a man there not dressed in a wedding garment. The king said to him, ‘My friend, how is it that you came in here without a wedding garment?’ But he was reduced to silence. Then the king said to his attendants, ‘Bind his hands and feet, and cast him into the darkness outside, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.’ Many are invited, but few are chosen.”

To understand this you have to appreciate that guests to a wedding at that time and in that place, coming over dusty roads, often from great distances, were provided facilities to wash and then were offered intricately embroidered garments to wear to the feast. This guest without the wedding garment, for whatever reason, had refused to put on the garment that was offered. Therefore, though he was invited, by refusing to wear the offered garment, he was cast out because of his defiance or rebelliousness or whatever reason he had.

What the Lord is telling us in this is that though we are invited to share in this Eucharistic Banquet, we must be willing to “put on Christ”. What that means is best expressed in Colossians 3, beginning with verse 12: “Put on, then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another...as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do. And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection...and whatever you do, in

word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”

What is so wonderful about this Feast is that it is a Sacrament, that is, an outward sign, instituted by Christ, to give grace’ or put more succinctly in today’s catechism, “an outside sign of God’s Love”. The greatness of the Sacraments is that they are effective signs, meaning they actualize what they signify. So, even if you came in here without “putting on Christ” by your sharing in this Holy Banquet, because of God’s infinite, merciful love, that Garment of Grace will cover you.

So, now, wearing our wedding garments, we continue our Celebration in honor of the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, at this Eucharistic Banquet as the guests who were brought in from the highways and byways of life, having been raised up out of the dark, murky waters of sin by a Savior upon whom we stand.

However, in receiving this Spiritual Nourishment, we are being strengthened to go back out to the highways and byways to lead others out of the murky waters in which they are drowning. How are we to do that? Perhaps the words of this beautiful hymn by Andre Crouche says it best:

**Tell them—even if they don’t believe you.
Just tell them—even if they don’t receive you.
Oh, tell them for me, tell them for me, please tell them for me,
Tell them that I love them and I came to let them know.
Tell them when it seems you are forsaken.
Just tell them though it seems your earth is shaken.
Oh, tell them for me. Tell them for me. Please tell them for me.
Tell them that I love them and I came to let them know.
Tell that lonely man who walks the cold streets all alone.
Tell that crying child who doesn’t have a home.
Tell those hungry people dying and lost in the desert.
They don’t even know that I care.
Tell them for me, please tell them that I love them.
Oh, just tell them on the streets and on the highways,
And tell them even on the by-ways.
Tell them I can mend the broken-hearted,
And restore the ones who have parted.
Tell them, please tell them for me, that I love them
And I came to let them know, and I came to let them know.
I came to let them know. Tell them!**