

Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Dear Parishioners and Friends,

With weddings deferred *sine die* and what few pared-down weddings that still take place in church followed by a hotel reception for a maximum of thirty people until Covid - 19 has become a painful part of our collective past, the parable in today's gospel comes across to a 2020 congregation as particularly poignant. The parable, which sets out to unpeel yet another layer of the complex onion that is "the kingdom of God", tells the story of a king who offered an invitation to his son's wedding feast that was refused by many. In the culture in which the parable was first told by Jesus it was customary for people to receive two invitations to such events: an initial invitation some time before the event, and a second just as the meal was ready. [In our culture too, one would first be approached to see if one were free/willing to accept an invitation to dinner at Windsor, Laken or any other palace, then the formal invitation would come - and be accepted - because to refuse a royal summons is *unpardonable*]. Declining the second invitation was always interpreted as an insult. It is this second invitation that the people decline in the parable that is read today.

The equivalent in the more humble social ranks most of us inhabit today would be to send a text ten minutes before the meal is due to start to say one is not coming to the dinner party. In the parable the king who invites people to the wedding feast of his son is an image of God who invites people to join his Son, Jesus. John the Baptist once referred to himself as the friend of the bridegroom. God invites all of us to become friends of the bridegroom, to join Jesus at table, to become his companions, to enter into communion with him and to live out of that. This the great Christian calling, the great invitation that God extends to all men and women. The fact that this calling is expressed in the terms of an invitation to a wedding feast suggests that there is a real celebratory element to this calling. It is a call to joy, not a superficial joy, but the deep-seated joy that comes from knowing that God values us so much that he desperately wants us to be present at his Son's great feast.

There is joy at the heart of Christian life, and each week we receive an invitation to articulate our own joy at the feast of the Eucharist. In coming to Mass, and many are now returning to Sunday Mass after the lockdown, and most experience a great deal of joy in doing so. Moreover they appreciate more profoundly what the Lord's invitation means to them, how much they have missed over the months since Covid - 19 appeared, and how good it is to be together with their brothers and sisters in faith around the banquet table of the Lord.

Father Patrick