

October 15, 2017 The Wedding Banquet Homily: In 1966, the American writer and author of the critically praised novel, *"In Cold Blood"*, Truman Capote, hosted a lavish masquerade ball at New York's Plaza Hotel in honor of the then publisher of the Washington Post, Katherine Graham. On the guest list were some of America's most prominent citizens. Of the 540 on the list, not one declined the invitation. All attended the grand feast. According to the local scribes, it turned out to be "the party of the century". Nevertheless, not everyone was pleased. Those who failed to receive an invitation were bitterly disappointed and worried that they were, for some unknown reason, demoted from the exclusive club known as the "A-list". They never forgave the writer for his inexcusable snub.

In reflecting on today's gospel reading, the parable of the Wedding Banquet, from Matthew's twenty-second chapter, we must bear in mind that the great events of Holy Week are fast approaching. The arrest and condemnation of Jesus is impending.

A wedding is a universal symbol of communal joy. In the parable (Mt.22:1-14), a father wants to throw the greatest party on earth on the occasion of his beloved son's wedding. He is bound and determined to make the wedding a huge success. He has watched carefully over every stage of its planning and execution, and goes out of his way to ensure that the invited guests attend to the wedding. To be invited by one's king to his son's wedding must have ranked among the very greatest privileges a subject of the king's realm could experience.

On the initial guest list are the "A-listers", consisting of the religious aristocracy of his day: the chief priests and elders of the people. They are given advance notice of the wedding, and have plenty of time to prepare themselves and set their agenda for the highly anticipated celebration. Regrettably, they simply could not take the time off for the banquet. "Some ignored the invitation and went away, one to his farm, another to his business". (Mt. 22:5) By refusing to go to the feast, the "A-listers" have forsaken an opportunity to enter into the presence of the king, and share in his joy. They have unwittingly cut themselves off from the living source of joy, nourishment and happiness. As one Cistercian monk puts it, "The greatest obstacle to admission to the kingdom is not sin so much, but rather the arrogant attitude that refuses to grasp God's hand when it is graciously and gladly extended". In frustration, the king then turns to those who are not found on anyone's list, the outcasts and forgotten members of the realm. They will unhesitatingly answer yes to his unexpected call. Their gratitude knows no bounds.

The "unworthy" person (Mt.22:8) is precisely the one who has been offered something great, something wholly undeserved, and turns it down.

What possible lessons can we learn from today's parable?

The Lord is always inviting us to a feast. This is particularly true of those who participate in the Eucharistic celebration. Recall the words of the priest just prior to the reception of Holy Communion, namely, "Blessed are those called to the Supper of the Lamb". To be admitted in the Divine Presence and share his company is a blessing unlike any other.

This parable calls our attention to the many nominal Christians in our midst. They are the ones who are too busy, too distracted by the passing things of life to take God's call with the utmost seriousness. They

have been called to the feast but have given no evidence that they are worthy to share in its many blessings.

Although we are invited to the banquet of the Eucharist now and to the banquet at the end of time, the heavenly banquet, it is not enough just to belong to the Church. We must be properly dressed. The so-called wedding garment suggests a life of good deeds, prayer and sacrifice.

Noteworthy in today's parable is the absence of the bride. She is not mentioned at all. Why?

According to the mystics who are undoubtedly influenced by St. Paul, the bride is the Church, and the bridegroom is Christ himself.

In our socially conscious Western world, status matters. To be on an "A-list" is to be in the company of some of the best and the brightest. But our Blessed Lord has another list, the list of whose names may greatly surprise us. Their concern is not to be members of an exclusive club, but only to be in the presence of the one who has invited them to the wedding banquet.

Amen!