



1) Opening prayer

God our Father,
may we love you in all things and above all things
and reach the joy you have prepared for us
beyond all our imagining.

We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

2) Gospel Reading - Matthew 22,1-14

Jesus began to speak to them in parables once again, 'The kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a king who gave a feast for his son's wedding. He sent his servants to call those who had been invited, but they would not come. Next he sent some more servants with the words, "Tell those who have been invited: Look, my banquet is all prepared, my oxen and fattened cattle have been slaughtered, everything is ready. Come to the wedding." But they were not interested: one went off to his farm, another to his business, and the rest seized his servants, maltreated them and killed them. The king was furious. He despatched his troops, destroyed those murderers and burnt their town. Then he said to his servants, "The wedding is ready; but as those who were invited proved to be unworthy, go to the main crossroads and invite everyone you can find to come to the wedding."

So these servants went out onto the roads and collected together everyone they could find, bad and good alike; and the wedding hall was filled with guests. When the king came in to look at the guests he noticed one man who was not wearing a wedding garment, and said to him, "How did you get in here, my friend, without a wedding garment?" And the man was silent. Then the king said to the attendants, "Bind him hand and foot and throw him into the darkness outside, where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth."

For many are invited but not all are chosen.'

3) Reflection

- Today's Gospel presents the parable of the banquet which we also find in the Gospel

of Matthew and of Luke, but with significant differences, which result from the point of view of each Evangelist. The background which leads both Evangelists to repeat this parable is the same. In the communities of the first Christians, both those of Matthew and those of Luke, the problem of living together between the converted Jews and the converted pagans, continued to be very alive. The Jews had ancient norms which prevented them from eating together with the pagans. Even entering into the Christian communities, many Jews kept the ancient custom of not sitting at the same table with the pagans. Thus, Peter had conflicts in the communities of Jerusalem, because he had entered the house of Cornelius, a pagan, and for having eaten together with him (Ac 11, 3). This same problem existed, though in a diverse way, in the communities of Luke and of Matthew. In Luke's community, in spite of the difference in race, of class and of gender, they had a great ideal of sharing and of communion (Ac 2, 42; 4, 32; 5, 12). For this reason, in Luke's Gospel (Lk 14, 15-24), the parable insists on the invitation addressed to all. The master of the feast, angry and upset because the first guests, who were invited, did not arrive, sends his servants to call the poor, the cripple, the blind, and invites them to participate in the banquet. But there is still place. Then, the master of the feast orders that all be invited, until his house is full. In Matthew's Gospel, the first part of the parable, (Mt 22, 1-10) has the same objective as that of Luke's Gospel. It succeeds in saying that the master of the feast orders to let the "good and the bad" enter (Mt 22, 10). But at the end, he adds another parable (Mt 22, 11-14) concerning the wedding garment, which insists on that which is specific of the Jews, the need of purity in order to be able to present oneself before God.

- Matthew 22, 1- 2: The invitation addressed to all. Some manuscripts say that the parable was told for the chief priests and for the elders of the People. This affirmation can serve even as a key for the reading, because it helps one to understand some strange points which appear in the story which Jesus is telling. The parable begins like this: "The Kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a king who gave a feast for his son's wedding". This initial affirmation recalls the most profound hope: the desire of the people to be with God always. Several times the Gospel refers to this hope, suggesting that Jesus, the son of the King, is the bridegroom who comes to prepare the wedding (Mk 2, 19); Rev 21, 2; 19, 9).
- Matthew 22, 3-6: The invited guests do not want to come. The king invites in a more insisting way, but the guests do not want to come. "But they were not interested: one went off to his farm, another to his business; and the rest seized his servants, maltreated them and killed them". In Luke what prevents them from accepting the invitation are the duties of daily life. The first one says: "I have bought a piece of land and must go to see it." The second one: "I have bought five yoke of oxen and am on my way to try them out". The third one: "I have just got married and so am unable to come!" (cf. Lk 14, 18-20). According to the norms and customs of the time, those persons had the right and even the duty not to accept the invitation they had received (cf. Dt 20, 5-7).
- Matthew 22 7: An incomprehensible war! The reaction of the king before the refusal is surprising. "Then the king was furious and he despatched his troops, destroyed those murderers and burnt their town". How is such a violent reaction to be interpreted? The

parable was told for the chief priests and for the elders of the people (Mt 22, 1), for those responsible for the nations. Many times, Jesus had spoken to them about the need for conversion. He even shed tears over the city of Jerusalem and said: "If you too had only recognized on that day the way to peace! But in fact it is hidden from your eyes. Yes, a time is coming when your enemies will raise fortifications all round you, when they will encircle you and hem you in on every side; they will dash you and the children inside your walls to the ground; they will leave not one stone standing on another within you, because you did not recognize the moment of your visitation". (Lk 19, 41-44). The violent reaction of the king in the parable probably refers to the fact of the prevision of Jesus. Forty years later, Jerusalem was destroyed (Lk 19, 41-44; 21, 6;).

- Matthew 22, 8-10: The banquet was not cancelled. For the third time, the king invites the people. He tells his servants: "The wedding banquet is ready, but those invited were unworthy; go to the main crossroads and invite everyone you can find to come to the wedding.

Going out on the streets, those servants collected together everyone they could find, bad and good alike; and the wedding hall was filled with guests." The bad who were excluded because they were considered to be impure from participation in the worship with the Jews, are now invited, specifically, by the king to participate in the feast. In the context of that time, the bad were the pagans. They also, are invited to participate in the wedding feast.

- Matthew 22, 11-14: The wedding garment. These verses tell us that the king went into the wedding hall and saw someone who was not wearing a wedding garment. And the king asked: "How did you get in here, my friend, without a wedding garment?" And he was silent. The story says that the man was bound hands and feet and thrown into the darkness outside. And the story concludes: "Many are invited but not all are chosen". Some scholars think that it is a question of a second parable which was added to lessen the impression which one has after the first parable, which speaks about "the good and the bad" who enter into the feast (Mt 22, 10). Even if one admits that it is not the observance of the Law which gives us salvation, but rather faith in the gratuitous love of God, that, in no way, diminishes the need for purity of heart as a condition to be able to appear before God.

4) Personal questions

- Who are the persons who are normally invited to our feasts? Why? Who are the persons who are not invited to our feasts? Why?
- Which are the reasons which today prevent many persons from participation in society and in the Church? Which are some of the reasons that persons give to exclude themselves from the duty to participate in the community? Are those reasons just?

5) Concluding Prayer

Do not thrust me away from your presence,
do not take away from me your spirit of holiness.
Give me back the joy of your salvation,

sustain in me a generous spirit. (Ps 51,11-12)