

The House Filled with Guests

*The Epistle and Gospel appointed at the Holy Communion: EPHESIANS 5. 15–21
AND SAINT MATTHEW 22. 1–14*

Let us pray. *O Almighty and most merciful God, of thy bountiful goodness keep us, we beseech thee, from all things that may hurt us; that we, being ready both in body and soul, may cheerfully accomplish those things which thou commandest; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Saint Luke's Day and today's Gospel give us one message. The mercy of God creates an open and healing Church. Saint Luke does not preserve Saint Matthew's exact parable of the wedding feast, but he tells related stories. In Luke's Gospel the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind are brought to the feast. Jesus receives widows, strangers, sinners, and people pushed to the margins. Both Gospels point us toward a Church that makes room.

The Invitation

In Matthew's parable, a king prepares a marriage feast. He sends servants to call the invited guests. Some refuse. Some return to their farms and businesses. Others mistreat and kill the servants. The king then sends his messengers into the highways: "*Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage.*" The servants gather "*all as many as they found, both bad and good,*" and the house is filled with guests.

The kingdom of heaven is not a private room for people who already know, agree with, and approve of one another. The king's house is filled by invitation. It is filled by people who never expected to be there.

A church that contains only like-minded people has failed in its mission. Christian unity is the gift of Christ, who gathers different people into one household and teaches them to love one another there.

The Church is not a club for the already convinced. Christ sends it into the highways and toward people whose lives, languages, histories, politics, wounds, and hopes differ from our own. Sameness is not the condition of belonging. If we make it so, we confuse the peace of Christ with the comfort of our own preferences.

Our society needs this Christian mind. Self-interested individualism tells each person to protect his own interests and his own side. The politics of division teaches us to fear or despise people outside our circle. The Gospel gives us another way. Life is received from God and shared with our neighbours. No one at the wedding feast is self-made. Every guest receives grace and carries a duty toward the person beside him.

The strength of America has been, at its best, the unity of its people. That unity requires a willingness to share one common life, refuse contempt, and accept duties toward neighbours outside our circle. The prayers of the Church serve that common life. We pray for the people to follow the commandments of God, for rulers to govern justly, and for neighbours to live together in truth, mercy, and peace.

Luke's Faces of Mercy

Saint Luke shows us this outward movement. At Nazareth, Jesus speaks of the widow of Sarepta and Naaman the Syrian. He reminds his hearers that God's mercy is not imprisoned within one familiar people. Luke gives us the widow at Nain, the Samaritan who becomes an example of neighbourly love, the poor summoned to the feast, and Zacchaeus received into the household of salvation.

Holy Scripture gives special care to the widow, the orphan, and the stranger. These persons are easily overlooked or treated as inconveniences. God commands his people not to forget them. Luke gives these commands human faces and places those faces in the path of Jesus.

That teaching matters in our present political climate. When immigrants and strangers are spoken of only as threats, burdens, or problems to be removed, the Church cannot repeat that language. Faithful Christians may disagree about public

policy. Christian speech cannot reduce human beings to problems. No border, document, accent, or political label places a person beyond the concern of God.

The stranger is a person made in the image of God and a neighbour whom God has placed before us. The widow, the orphan, and the stranger test whether our worship has become real. They show whether the Church is an open house of healing or a guarded room where the comfortable reassure one another that they are right.

The Garment of Mercy

Matthew then brings us to the difficult guest. The king finds a man without a wedding garment. The parable gives us no reason to turn that garment into a code for nationality, legal status, language, culture, or respectability. The guests have been gathered from the highways. They have not had time to become insiders by their own efforts.

The garment tells us that an invitation changes the people who receive it. The feast is not a benefit that we consume while remaining untouched by the household. The garment is the life that fits the mercy we have received. It is humility, gratitude, repentance, patience, and love.

The Epistle tells us what this garment looks like. We are to redeem the time because the days are evil. We are to be filled with the Spirit and to give thanks to God. We are to submit ourselves to one another in the fear of God. The Church is not made holy by making every member identical. It is made holy as different people learn to receive one another under the lordship of Christ.

The warning is not aimed first at the stranger pulled from the road. It is aimed at the insider who wants the benefits of the feast without accepting its life. He accepts grace for himself and refuses mercy to his neighbour. He remains clothed in suspicion, pride, and contempt. He has not allowed the house to enter him.

A Healing Church

The Collect for Saint Luke gives us the prayer this day requires: *“Manifest in thy Church the like power and love, to the healing of our bodies and our souls.”* A healing Church must be an inclusive Church, not an exclusive one. This does not make truth unimportant. It does not remove the demands of discipleship. It means that the door of mercy is not guarded by our private list of people who seem worthy to enter.

The Church should be a place where the widow is visible, the orphan finds a household, and the stranger becomes a neighbour. An immigrant should pray without being treated as a threat. The lonely should be known by name. A disagreement should not turn a neighbour into an enemy.

A church that has only like-minded people has made the Church smaller than Christ’s invitation. It has chosen the safety of resemblance over reconciliation. We entered the feast because mercy came looking for us. The Church’s unity is not an escape from the common life of the nation. It is a witness to a better way of living within it. We learn to seek the good of the whole.

We cannot control every word spoken in our nation. We can decide what words will be spoken at our doors. We can refuse dehumanizing speech, learn names, listen to stories, share food, and offer practical help. We can make room for people whose presence stretches our habits. We can ask the Holy Ghost to clothe us in the mercy we claim to have received. This is how the Church’s prayer becomes public witness. It teaches us to obey the commandments of God in ordinary life.

At the Holy Table, we come as guests, not owners. We come from different roads and carry different histories, but depend upon the same grace. Christ makes us one household and teaches us to see one another as brothers and sisters.

On Saint Luke’s Day, we give thanks for Christ’s healing mercy. On this Sunday, we hear that the wedding must be furnished with guests. May the Church welcome the widow, the orphan, and the stranger and wear the garment of mercy. Then the house will be Christ’s household, filled with guests. Amen.