

Dear Friends,

Cheering crowds have long lined the processional route of British royal weddings. Yet only a privileged elite are admitted into the ceremony. Such occasions are now televised worldwide. In 2011, an audience of thirty-six million watched Prince William and Catherine Middleton exchange their wedding vows in a live broadcast from Westminster Abbey. Indeed, those watching at home enjoyed a better view than many who were there. Among the invited guests were plenty of titled people and heads of state. After all, Prince William was the late Queen's grandson and second in line to the throne. But there were other celebrities, too, such as David Beckham and Elton John. Mingling with the glitterati were faces few recognized: the Middleton family butcher, for example, their grocer, and the village postman.

Surprisingly, some people turned the invitation down. For some, it was understandable. The Canadian Prime Minister was in the middle of an election campaign, and the King of Spain was recovering from surgery. Japan had just suffered a tsunami, so the Crown Prince could not go; and Irish rugby union captain was due to play in an important cup semi-final the next day. One person, however, made the excuse that it was too near his birthday – perhaps he could not find the right outfit.

Having “nothing to wear” was not always a problem. At the time of Jesus, it was customary for royal hosts to provide garments for their guests. In today's Gospel Jesus tells a parable about a king who did just that. As it happened, everyone he invited to his son's wedding backed out at the last minute. So the king abandoned his original list, and welcomed to the banquet only those who really wanted to be there.

Jesus' parable came as a solemn warning. If you are not willing to rejoice in my company, he was saying, then others will take your place. Notorious sinners were already to be seen eating and drinking with Jesus and his disciples, for Jesus was living in anticipation of the heaven on earth of which Isaiah spoke. Isaiah had described it as a banquet for all people. Jesus scandalous table fellowship was exactly that, and it gave a powerful message. Everyone is welcome to share Christ's joy, both now and for eternity. What matters is how much you want it.

Christ will indeed return to claim his bride, the Church. That day need not be a distant dream. Just as Jesus enjoyed God's presence as a daily reality, so he taught his followers to live generously and joyously as though they were already in heaven. Each celebration of the Eucharist is a foretaste of that glorious marriage feast. Of course, the rich spiritual nourishment of the Mass is not everyone's idea of a banquet. Isaiah knew that desire to God's presence, and feel comfortable with God's family, people need to change. God offers to make us holy or to give us a garment of righteousness. Imagine, said Jesus at the end of his parable, trying to get into the heavenly banquet without one.

Many of us pray the Lord's Prayer asking that God's kingdom might come on earth “as it is in heaven.” Our heavenly Father longs to make it so, but we need to cooperate with that work of grace in allowing God to change us. We can start today by asking Jesus to adorn us with kindness, gentleness, patience and all the other fruits of his Spirit. After all, if we are going to be wearing that robe of righteousness for eternity, we'd better start trying it on for size.

Your friend in Jesus  
Msgr. Zach