28th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Homily: Fr. Shijo George
Pastor – Sacred Heart Catholic Church, Victoria, BC, Canada

In our everyday lives, when we invite someone to an event or celebration, we usually invite them once or twice. If the person does not seem interested, we might say: "I have invited them. If they don't want to come, that is their choice." We rarely continue persuading someone who repeatedly refuses our invitation.

In today's Gospel, however, we encounter a King whose behaviour is very different. Even when the invited guests refuse to come, he sends his servants again, saying: "Everything is ready; come to the wedding banquet!" What a beautiful picture of God's heart! God does not give up on us easily. He continues to call us because He desires us to share in the joy of His Kingdom. Throughout salvation history, God called His people through the prophets and, finally, He sent His own Son, Jesus Christ, to invite everyone to come into communion with Him. Even today, God invites us through His Word, the Eucharist, the Church, and the people we encounter. Sometimes He invites us to forgive someone, to reconcile with a person, to help someone in need, or to return to prayer. The question is not whether God continues to invite us, but whether we are willing to respond.

Look at the people in the parable. One went to his farm, and another went to his business. These were not necessarily bad things. Work and responsibility are important in our lives. But they allowed their everyday concerns to become more important than the invitation of the King. Isn't this something we experience in our own lives?

We become so busy with work, responsibilities, ambitions, and personal interests that we keep postponing nurturing our relationship with God. We tell ourselves that we will pray later, forgive someone another day, or return to God when life becomes less busy. Sometimes, we do not reject God openly; we reject Him subtly by continually postponing our response. Yet the King's invitation extends even to those in the streets, both good and bad. This reveals the extraordinary mercy of God. He does not invite us because we are

already perfect; He invites us because He loves us and wants to transform us. No one should think that their past is too sinful or their life too broken for God's invitation.

Then comes the surprising part of the Gospel, when the King enters the banquet hall and notices a man who is not wearing a wedding garment. The King asks him: "Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?" The man is speechless, and the King orders him to be cast outside.

We may wonder: Why was the King so patient with those who refused his invitation, yet so strict with someone who actually came to the banquet? The answer lies in the difference between accepting God's invitation, and genuinely responding to it. The King generously welcomes the guests, but entering the banquet hall is not the end of the story. Their presence at the celebration must be accompanied by a genuine response in the willingness to fully participate in the celebration.

What, then, is this wedding garment?

St. Augustine offers us a beautiful insight. He explains that the wedding garment represents charity, the genuine love that should flow from our faith. It is possible to participate in religious celebrations and appear outwardly faithful while our hearts remain filled with hatred, pride, selfishness, and indifference towards others. The wedding garment reminds us that we cannot separate our faith in God from the way we live and love.

Pope Benedict XVI also reflected on the wedding garment as a garment of love. Our Christian life is not simply about receiving God's grace; it is about allowing that grace to transform us so that we can love God and our neighbour more sincerely.

Dear brothers and sisters, imagine that the King is here in church with us today, looking into each of our hearts. What will He find? Will He find the garment of forgiveness, or will He find resentment that we have carried for years? Will He find compassion, or indifference towards others? Will He find humility, generosity, and love; or pride and selfishness?

The wedding garment does not mean that we must become perfect before approaching God. Rather, it means that we must be willing to change. When we fail, we repent. When we hurt someone, we seek reconciliation. When we encounter someone in need, we offer our help. We receive God's grace and cooperate with it through our daily choices.

There is a beautiful balance reflected in the Gospel, today. The King teaches us never to underestimate God's mercy, because He continues to invite us, but the wedding garment reminds us to never take that mercy for granted.

Perhaps today, God is inviting us to return to prayer; to forgive someone; abandon a harmful habit; or become more faithful in our Christian responsibilities. Let us not postpone our response. As we accept His invitation, let us prepare our wedding garment through sincere faith, repentance, and love.