

INVITE EVERYONE YOU CAN FIND TO THE WEDDING

On the 11th of February 2013, Pope Benedict XVI shocked the entire world when he announced his resignation from the Papacy, making him the first Pope in 600 years to resign from that office. To avoid any vacuum, Pope Benedict XVI announced that his resignation would become effective on the 28th of February 2013 to give the College of Cardinals the needed time to convene in Rome and commence preparations for the Conclave to elect a new Pope. During the various meetings the Cardinals engaged in to prepare for the Conclave, various speeches were given, however, one speech made a lasting impression on the Cardinals; that speech was delivered by one Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio. This is what he told his fellow Cardinals: **“The Church is called to come out of herself and go to the peripheries, not only geographically, but also the existential peripheries: the mystery of sin, of pain, of injustice, of ignorance and indifference to religion, of intellectual currents, and of all misery.”** We were told the above speech made a deep impact on the Cardinals that they all gave him a standing ovation. Furthermore, many Cardinals stated that after listening to that speech, their minds were made up that they would cast their votes for Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio as the next Pope of the Catholic Church and they did. After his election as the 266th Pope of the Catholic Church, in his First Encyclical Letter ‘*Evangelii Gaudium*’, Pope Francis codified the above view he has of the Church thus: **“I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the street, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security.”** Since his inauguration, Pope Francis in his thoughts, words and actions has continued to make it clear that everyone is welcomed in the Church and that all of us are sons and daughters of God equally. Yes, he has opened the gates for the reception of the Holy Eucharist to Catholics who are divorced and civilly married; he has promoted women to high positions in the Vatican Curia; he has reassured LGBTQ+ individuals that God does not hate them; he has encouraged old people to share their wisdom with the young and has asked the young to serve the Church and humanity with their vitality. Pope Francis did not invent these things himself; he is merely putting into practice what he learnt from Christ Himself as we hear in the readings of this Sunday.

In our Gospel pericope from Matthew Chapter 22, Christ gave us a glimpse of how the kingdom of God would be composed. When the “Self-acclaimed Heavenly” Elites, Elects, Celebrities, who were given their Special Invitations and were reminded of the same, failed to honour the invitation to the wedding feast of the century; the king asked his servants to go to the crossroads in the town and invite everyone they could find to the wedding. The Greek word used there for the crossroads is *Diexodos* meaning the boundaries of towns and cities, the outskirts, thoroughfares, outlets, highways, byways, exits. At the time of Jesus *Diexodos* were places the rejected, ostracised, and abandoned people of the society stayed. No official nor civilised person would like to hang around any *Diexodos* nor have any connection with it; however, it was to such a place that the king sent his servants to. In sending his servants to *Diexodos*, the king gave them one command – **To invite everyone they could find to the wedding.** The Greek word used there for invite is *Kaleo* meaning to invite, call specially, and summon particularly.

Little wonder the Gospel told us that both the good and the bad were included in that invitation. This inclusive invitation of everyone to the banquet is echoed in today's First Reading from Prophet Isaiah Chapter 25 where it is stated that the Lord of hosts will prepare a banquet for ALL PEOPLE. The First Reading further informed us that this banquet would be made up of fine strained wines, with rich and juicy food. Who would not want to be participate in such a banquet? Although everyone is invited to this wedding banquet, there is only one prerequisite to partake of it – Everyone must wear *Endyma Gamos* – 'A Proper Wedding Banquet Outer Garment'. This proper wedding banquet outer garment does not need to be from Gucci, Louis Vuitton, Balenciaga, Versace, Burberry, and the like; however, without it, even the person who had been admitted into the venue, will not be allowed to participate in it. Little wonder the king had to send into perpetual punishment the man who was at the wedding venue without the appropriate wedding garment.

My friends, the two crucial lessons from our Sunday readings are:

1. **Everyone is invited to the wedding banquet of God.** It does not matter who we are, what our background might be, the religion we follow and the many mistakes we have made or will make in life; the fact is that everyone is invited to the heavenly banquet of God. It is pertinent to state here that nobody is irredeemable even the hardest of criminals. Our God is the God of last minute.com and He is ever ready to forgive and welcome everyone into the heavenly banquet. Yes, there is hope for us all. Thanks be to God for that.
2. **The only wedding garment that is required for this heavenly banquet is the expensive garment made up of our charitable deeds to all peoples without discrimination nor demarcations.** It is on this garment of charity that all of us would be assessed at the end of time. However, there is one thing that bothers me greatly. From my personal experience so far, those who see themselves as atheists tend to be better people than many of us who are Christians. Atheists tend to say what they mean as well as mean what they say. When they help those in need, they do so because they want the world to be a better place for all. However, when I encounter Christians and Catholics, we tend to be too prejudiced, judgemental, and critical of every other person apart from ourselves. And when some of us engage in charitable works, we make sure there are camera crew to cover everything we are doing to publish them on our social media platforms and eulogise ourselves. Let us remember the admonition of Christ that our left hand must not know what our right is doing.

My friends, like Pope Francis who is reaching out to all those on the margins and peripheries of the Church and our world, let us as individuals and as a parish reach out to all those on the peripheries of Fleet and Church Crookham. **ALL WE NEED IS LOVE!**

Fr Johnpromise Umeozuru

Homily for the 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A (15/10/2023)