

HOMILY ~ 28th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

OCTOBER 14/15, 2023

I think we have all been to weddings and wedding receptions. They are very joyous events. You have a great meal, you get to socialize with lots of people and it is a really fun evening. We want to go to the wedding and the reception, but there is a cost to going, right? You have to be dressed appropriately, so you may need to buy some new clothes. You have to give a gift. If you are standing up in the wedding, you will probably have to rent a tuxedo or buy a dress that you will never wear again. If it is a destination wedding, you may have to rent a hotel room or even buy a plane ticket. The weddings are fun, but there is a cost.

In the Gospel today, we heard the parable of the king who gave a wedding feast for his son. He invited people, but they refused the invitation. We are not sure why. Maybe it cost too much, maybe they had to travel too far, maybe they did not like the couple or the king or maybe they had conflicts in their schedules, but they refused. Finally, the king invited everybody so his dining hall would be filled with guests. One individual came who was not dressed appropriately, and the king threw him out.

Just like the king, God invites everyone to the wedding feast. The wedding feast is the Kingdom of Heaven. The parable is addressed to the chief priests and the elders. Many of them pretty much already refused to attend. They refused to accept Jesus as the Messiah they had been waiting for. Maybe the cost was too high. They would have to change their lives and their beliefs; and change is hard for people. God invites everyone to the Kingdom of Heaven because he wants heaven to be full. But there is a cost. Jesus told us what that was when he gave us the new commandment: *Love and serve the Lord by loving and serving others*. Just like that man that showed up to the wedding feast dressed inappropriately. You need to do more than just show up. Jesus is calling us to perform acts of kindness for one another.

God created our human nature, and he actually hardwired us to perform acts of kindness. Studies on our brains have shown that when we do something for someone else, when we perform acts of kindness, three hormones are released in our brains: dopamine, serotonin and oxytocin, which human beings need to flourish. As it turns out, the best thing you can do for yourself is to perform acts of kindness for others. If you are not happy with the way things are going in the world, this is the way we can change things with one act of kindness at a time. But there is a cost. You have to put yourself out there. You have to put other people's needs ahead of your own. Sometimes the greatest acts of kindness that we can perform come from a great deal of suffering. Jesus can bring goodness out of anything if you let him. Jesus wastes nothing.

I want to give you a few examples of the acts of kindness that can come out of great suffering. It is very hard to grieve the death of someone you love. It involves suffering, and it takes time to heal. Once you have healed, you can help other people who are grieving because it is part of your experience. One of my friends and I have talked about writing a book titled, *"Things You Should Never Say to a Grieving Person."* The people who say these things are usually people that have never grieved the loss of a loved one. One example is, *"You just have to get over it and get back to normal."* Those of us who have grieved the loss of a loved one know that you never get over it, and you need time to find your new normal. When my mother died, someone said to me, *"I know exactly how you feel. My dog died about a year ago."* I looked at her and thought, *"Your parents are both alive. That is why you can say that."* But I did not say it, I just thought it. We have a program here called *Grief Share*. It is a 13 week program that helps people through the process. Once you have been through the program, you may be able to do a great act of kindness and lead future groups. You may not have seen yourself as a group leader, but you very well may be.

Another painful experience is going through a divorce. Once you have lived through it and healed, you can help others. We have a program called *Divorce Care*. It is always led by people who have been through a divorce. Once you have been through the program, you may be a great leader for future groups.

Overcoming an addiction is another difficult and painful process. Once you have overcome the addiction, you can help others do the same. Twelve step programs are very effective because they have a spiritual component and everyone has the addiction. They call each other out because they know when people are lying because they have been there. That is an act of kindness. Once you have been through the process, you may be able to be a sponsor for someone else.

Performing acts of kindness does have a cost. Sometimes they involve great suffering. But God will bring goodness out of suffering if you let him. I have talked to many people who have lived through horrible situations, and they can usually tell me the good that has come out of it. Look at the most difficult thing you have done in your life. Can that be a basis for an important act of kindness? God will help you do it and discern what you are called to do. Do you want to go to the wedding banquet, the Kingdom of Heaven?

Love and Peace,

Fr. Jim