

If you are following the Mass in a Missal or from the newsletter you may notice that this weekend there is an option of a 'short' or 'long' version of the Gospel reading. I have just proclaimed the longer version (Matthew 22:1-14). It is not unusual for the Lectionary to offer a 'short' or 'long' version of a reading, usually for very practical reasons. However what is unusual in this case is that leaving out the final few verses, which is the difference between the long version and the short version dramatically changes the meaning of what we hear.

If we had heard the short version then we would have ended at the point where 'the wedding hall was filled with guests' and we would have rejoiced at the great generosity of the king, although we might have some reservations about the treatment meted out to those who originally refused his invitation. However listening to the longer version forces us to consider the fate of the man who was not wearing a wedding garment and we are left with a more challenging ending which tells us that 'many are called, but few are chosen'.

Scripture scholars speculate as to whether we have here one single parable or two separate parables linked together by the evangelist. One argument in favour of the latter idea is the fact that when Luke uses a similar parable in his Gospel (Luke 14:15-24) it does not contain the verses about the man without the wedding garment but ends with the invitation being extended to the 'open roads and hedgerows' to make sure that the house is full. However interesting as it is to study how the different Gospels have been put together, we hear and read them as they are now, believing that these are the words that the Holy Spirit wants us to hear today.

So today we can reflect on both the great generosity of the invitation that the Lord makes to us, and also on the need for us to make a proper response. Again we can speculate on what exactly the wedding garment is meant to represent. Does it represent 'faith', does it represent the good works that are the result of a life of faith, or is it a combination of the two. As Catholics we would say 'a combination of the two', but some of our friends from other churches might understand this very differently.

The First Reading (Isaiah 25:6-10) also describes a great banquet, and it is a reading that we often hear at funerals because it speaks of the time when 'the Lord will destroy death for ever and wipe away the tears from every cheek'. As we hear these words does something stir within us more than simply the thought of rich food and fine wines? Do we feel and recognise a desire that we too would be present at that banquet? Can we recognise our participation in the Eucharist (even if we do so by virtual means) as an anticipation of that banquet which awaits us? If we respond to the invitation to share in the Eucharist and allow that sharing in the Eucharist to truly transform and shape our lives then we are already wearing our wedding garment ready for the day when the Lord invites us to share in the great wedding feast, the great banquet of heaven.

The video version of the homily can be seen here: <https://youtu.be/jRDc5gmiEFo>

You might also enjoy:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JC2NgfkfD5c&t=11s>