

COME AS YOU ARE — BUT DON'T STAY AS YOU ARE

Have you ever received an invitation to a very special occasion? You don't just say, "I have been invited." You begin to prepare; what you will wear, how you will get there.

This weekend, the readings invite us to the magnificent banquet God prepares for us. But the Gospel reminds us: we can come as we are, but we must not remain as we are.

Notice whom the king invites. When the original guests refuse, the servants are sent to the roads to gather everyone they can find — "both good and bad" (Mt 22:10). That is the generosity of God. He does not say, "Get your life completely together and then come to Me." He says: Come with your wounds, your failures, your questions, your broken relationships, even when your faith is weak. God's mercy is greater than our failures.

Pope Francis, reflecting on this Gospel, reminds us that God invites everyone. This is important because many stay away thinking, "I have made too many mistakes. God could never forgive me. I have been away too long." But the Gospel tells us otherwise. The invitation is still there.

The father who has neglected prayer can begin again. The mother carrying resentment can begin again. The young person who has made mistakes can begin again. The person who has stopped going to Mass can come home again. The person who has fallen into sin can go to Confession and begin again. God says: "Come to the feast."

But the Gospel also says: do not remain as you are. The king spots a man without a wedding garment. At first this seems strange — if he was brought in from the street, how could he have a garment? The point is not clothing, but the condition of the heart.

Jesus accepts the sinner, but He calls the sinner to change. He meets Zacchaeus as he is, but Zacchaeus does not remain the same. He welcomes the woman caught in sin, but tells her to sin no more. He calls Peter after his failure, but Peter becomes a different man. That is what grace does. Grace welcomes us, forgives us, and transforms us.

So what is the wedding garment? St. Gregory the Great gives a beautiful answer: the wedding garment is love. Pope Benedict XVI explained it as the "clothes of love" — love of God and neighbour. St. Augustine says it is charity flowing from a pure heart.

This gives us a practical examination: Do I love my spouse when things are difficult? Do I love my children patiently? Can I forgive someone who hurt me? Can I help someone who cannot repay me?

It is possible to come to Mass wearing beautiful clothes while the heart is wearing resentment. It is possible to receive Communion while refusing to forgive. It is possible to know the prayers while failing to love the person beside us.

There is a story of a man known for being difficult; quick to anger, easily offended. One day his daughter said, "Dad, you say we are Christians, but why do you treat people this way?" That Sunday at Mass he heard, "If you want God to forgive you, learn to forgive." After Mass he called a neighbour, he had not spoken to in years and said, "I don't want to carry this anger anymore. Can we begin again?"

Nothing spectacular happened, just a man who decided to put on the wedding garment of love.

My dear people, the message is both beautiful and challenging. Come as you are — if you are tired, discouraged, if you have failed, come. But once you have come, let Christ change you.

Come with your weakness and go with His strength. Come with your wounds and go with His healing. Come with your old heart and allow Christ to give you a new heart.

Have a blessed thanksgiving.