

Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle A
Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception – October 15, 2017
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Forty years ago, I entered what was then Christian Brothers College, wondering how I would make the adjustment from the structure of high school to the much looser environment of a college campus. At first, I just concentrated on going to class. But about a month into my freshman year, one of my instructors came to class with an odd request. It seems that she was directing a play – “The Front Page” by Hecht and MacArthur. The play was set to premiere in only two weeks time. Unfortunately, one of the actors had become ill and had to leave the cast. She invited – begged, actually – any man in class to please come to the college theatre that afternoon to try out for what she described as a small part. I thought – only two weeks, it could be fun, so I went to the audition. Actually, no audition was necessary as I was the only one who showed up. I played a newspaper reporter. When the lights came up, I was seated behind a desk, with my feet propped up, pretending to be asleep. Unfortunately, had I been a member of the audience, I would not have had to pretend to be asleep. The show was – well, not quite up to Broadway standards, and my performance certainly contributed to that. Now you might think that appearing in a flop would have traumatized me, scared me away from the theatre. But what the audience didn’t see on stage was that everyone in that show had a great time. Those two weeks were such fun! I met people in that cast who are still my friends to this day. From that beginning, I got involved in tons of extracurricular activities – student government and social clubs and academic clubs and the student newspaper. And I eventually became the Director of the CBC Theatre Guild. I loved my experience at what is now Christian Brothers University and I can trace that happiness directly back to that desperate invitation issued by the show’s director all those years ago.

In our gospel today, Jesus tells us a parable about invitations – those rejected and those accepted. A king was hosting a wedding banquet for his son. He undoubtedly expected that everyone who was anyone would be there. He was the king, after all. So when everything was ready, he sent out his servants to gather the invited guests. But those invited refused to come. Some had better things to do – they were focused on their farm or their business. Others were just ungrateful. Rather than simply declining the invitation, they actually mistreated and killed the king’s servants. We don’t know what the king or his son had done to incur such wrath – if they had done anything at all; but whatever it was, the banquet hall was empty. A few years ago, people were clamoring to get an invitation to the wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton. Imagine if no one had shown up at Westminster Abbey, if the banquet table at Buckingham Palace had hundreds of empty chairs. What would Her Majesty have done? Well, maybe the same thing the king did in the parable. If the invited guests won’t come, we’ll just expand the guest list – bring in any and everybody, whomever you can find – good and bad – rich and poor – talented actors and those who were just mediocre like me. It was a last minute invitation, a desperate invitation, but an invitation nonetheless. And in the end, the banquet hall was filled, and the reception might not have gone exactly as planned – the crowd may have

been a little rowdier, the performance might have been a little boring – but the show went on.

On the surface, of course, this parable is meant to describe the birth of the Church. The invited guests, the chosen people of God, did not see fit to accept the king's invitation – did not recognize Jesus as the Christ, as the king's only begotten Son. So the doors to the banquet hall were opened to all of us – Jew and Gentile, good and bad. Like that wedding feast, the Church does not consist of only the chosen, only those who are descendants of Abraham. The invitation is now extended to all – and the wedding feast is filled with all who accept. The Church now extends to every corner of the globe – people of every race and language and nationality have accepted the invitation to the wedding feast of the Lamb.

But today's parable is not just about welcoming Gentiles into the new covenant in Christ's blood – as important as that is for us. Today's parable is also very personal – challenging our own response to God's call. You see, our loving God continually beckons us, continually invites us into a closer relationship with him. Sometimes we gratefully accept. Sometimes we eagerly throw ourselves into the work of discipleship. And we come to Mass – to the mountain top that Isaiah describes – to this great wedding feast of the Lamb of God to be nourished and sustained with the Bread of Angels, with the cup of salvation. Yes, sometimes we accept the invitation, though – candidly – sometimes we reject God's call. Our work is too lucrative, our lives too pleasurable to bother with the task of helping others. Let others be disciples – I'll follow my own agenda. Too often, we turn away in sin as did those important guests who received the first invitations. Yes, sometimes we eagerly accept invitations, and sometimes we reject them out of hand – but often we're just a little tentative. We accept God's invitations with reservations, delicately dipping our toe in the water to see if it is too hot or too cold. That's how I approached my first audition all those years ago. That's how many of the saints of our tradition began their path of discipleship. Most of them never set out to be martyrs or doctors of the Church or to establish religious communities. They just encountered God in prayer and decided to respond or they saw a need and reached out in charity. From that one tentative step, God guided them along the path of discipleship – step by step, one invitation after another. Like most of us, if they had seen their destination at the beginning, they might have been too scared to accept that initial invitation. But God was with them on the journey, leading them carefully, giving them strength and nourishment, but not revealing too much of his plan.

In the course of our lives, whether we realize it or not, we get many invitations from God. Some we are eager to accept. But others we are tempted to reject – we are afraid that God will interfere with our plans. I urge us to listen for God's call in our lives. St. Paul tells us in the second reading that God will fully supply whatever we need, in accord with the glorious riches in Christ Jesus. May we trust in the Lord, accept his invitations, however tentatively, in spite of our fears, perhaps. God has a way of surprising us. If we follow the Lord, the great wedding feast of heaven awaits – how we get there, the twists and turns along the path, is all part of the adventure.