

# 28<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Year

---

According to a new survey of 4,000 brides, the average cost of a UK wedding is now £27,161 – the highest it's ever been and up 9.6% from last year. The single biggest wedding expenditure is venue hire, costing an average of £4,354. The honeymoon is the second biggest outlay for the wedding, an average of £3,630, followed by food at £3,353. The survey revealed that parents are no longer the sole financial contributors for the big day as 51% of couples pay for it themselves with a little help from family contribution, while 32% of couples are funding it themselves completely. Weddings are also becoming more expensive for guests with elaborate stag or hen nights sometimes in exotic locations.

How many people walk the streets clad in wedding garments just waiting for an invitation? Of course, it is a silly question! The people dragged in from the highways and byways were not wearing wedding garments just in case. It was the custom for the host to provide a garment for his guests, one they would take home as a gift afterwards, and for a king we can be sure that such a robe would be very splendid. The King is embarrassed. Have his servants let him down? Here is a man without a garment! The man is silent. He has refused the gift. He is good enough as he is. What an insult to his host! No wonder he is cast out into the darkness!

Today's Gospel picks up the idea in last week's parable of the tenants of the vineyard killing the son and heir and puts in a different context – the Kingdom of Heaven as a royal wedding feast. The chief priests and Pharisees represent those invited and offered a special place through God's covenant with Moses. They were content to be descended from Abraham, and to keep the rules and regulations. They paid no heed to the prophets. They have killed John the Baptist. They will put Our Lord himself to death. Jerusalem will be sacked, and the temple burned to the ground. The Jewish people will be slaughtered and scattered in exile.

Instead, others will be invited through the New and Eternal Covenant brought by Our Lord. Worthy or unworthy, all will be made welcome. Their sins will be transformed by the white robe of baptismal grace, washed clean in the blood of the Lamb. No one is barred. Certainly the first to enter will be those who would have been entitled to enter under the Old Covenant, Our Lady and the apostles. But they come in on a wholly new basis, the saving sacrifice of Christ. Only those who refuse the wedding garment offered by the King are unwelcome. We cannot speculate about those who through no fault of their own are not granted the gift of faith. There is such a thing as the baptism of desire. We must entrust them to God's mercy.

It is tempting for us to be content with hoping that we are among those clad in the wedding garments and seated at the table. However, the banquet is in the future. Here and now we are the servants sent out into the highways and byways to fill up the places at the wedding feast. Our task is not to provide the wedding garment – that is the gift of grace – but to bring people to a position where they are open to that gift. The Church teaches that all of us are called upon to be missionaries. How seriously do we take this task? Do we pray for our family, friends, neighbours, and work-colleagues? Do we look for opportunities to open their hearts to our Lord, through words or acts of kindness, by the example of our own lives?

Secondly, how can we touch the hearts of others unless the grace of God is at work in us? Are we in a state of grace? If God calls us to his banquet in heaven today, will we be wearing the spotless white robe of our baptism? What are our priorities in life? Are we like those originally invited to the feast? Do we make excuses when God asks something of us? Do we really understand just what is on offer or see it as something unimportant? Isaiah's vision of a feast was given at a time of warfare and hunger, when in human terms there was little to hope for and not much to eat here and now. Whatever our personal circumstances, when we see endless full shelves in a supermarket it can rather take the edge off the image of a banquet! St Paul challenges us: do we know how to be rich? Do we know how to be rich without losing sight of what really matters? Do we know how to be rich without losing the company of Jesus here in this life and at the banquet in the Kingdom of heaven?