

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Jesus is in the home of the enemy. He is eating at the table of a Pharisee, surrounded by many of this Pharisee's friends—more Pharisees. They were watching Him intently. A man walks in with dropsy, and Jesus asks them, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?" They are silent. Jesus heals the man, then asks the Pharisees, "Which of you, having a donkey or an ox that has fallen into a pit, will not immediately pull him out on the Sabbath day?" They are unable to answer Him. (cf. Luke 14:1-6)

Being at the table, Jesus then teaches them proper table etiquette. When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, don't take the first seat, take the last. It's better to be told to move up than to be told to move down. When you give a dinner or supper, do not invite those who can repay you, but those who are unable to repay you; then, you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just. There are eschatological implications in what Jesus is teaching them, for the wedding feast to which He is referring to is ultimately the Feast of Victory of the Lamb in His Kingdom which has no end and the dinner or supper is ultimately the Lord's Supper where those who are unable to repay Jesus for His body and blood are stooped at His table receiving from Him forgiveness, life, and salvation which prepares them for the resurrection as the just. (cf. Luke 14:7-14)

They are both the same feast, for in taking the Lord's Supper, you are partaking of the Feast of Victory. It would seem one of the Pharisees understood this, if only in part. "Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!"

So, Jesus tells the parable. A certain man gave a great supper and invited many. When the feast had been prepared, this man sent a second invitation. That's when the excuses came in. "I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused." "I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused." "I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come." Upon hearing the excuses, the master of the house was infuriated. He commands his servants to go into the streets of the city and bring in the outcasts. The servant does so and reports that there is still room. From there, the master sends his servant outside of the city to compel people to come. None of the men who were invited shall taste his supper.

It's worth mentioning the bringing in of the city's outcasts and the compulsion of the outsiders is a cultural phenomenon. "In the Mideast, an unexpected invitation must be refused, especially when one is a foreigner or outcast, which is why the [servant "brings" and] "compels" them to come in." (Rev. Dr. Arthur A. Just, Jr., Luke 9:51—24:53, 576) Their refusal is denied, and they find a place as the master's banquet; it must be full, but none of the original guests will be there.

Now, on the outset, we can identify who these people in Jesus' parable are. The original invitees are the people of Israel who reject Jesus as the Messiah. Among them, of course, would be the Pharisees, and you can bet that His table-mates realize this, especially given the beatitude spoken by one of the attendees. The city's outcasts were the people of Israel who knew that they could never measure up to the Pharisee's standards of holiness, which, of course, the Law of God also demands. These would refuse the invitation to the banquet because they deem that they are not worthy. Finally, the outcasts from outside of the city would be Gentiles who come to the faith. These also would refuse the invitation because they know that they are but little dogs who deserve little more than the crumbs that would fall from the table. (cf. Matthew 15:27) Both sets of outcasts would be considered such because of their sinfulness; they could not keep the law as well as the Pharisees required, and they knew it, too.

The excuses of the Pharisees and the holier-than-thou, religious Jews would be many—land, ox, wife, etc.—but they all boil down to the same thing: "I don't have time for Jesus, but that's okay, I can make it on my own." All the excuses are of one accord.

So, today, the banquet guests are made up of those outcast Jews and their descendants who knew of their sins and knew no way out from under them except by the grace of God, as well as the outcast outsiders who were added to their number (cf. Acts 2:41) and their descendants. These people, looked down upon by the

same people who looked down upon Jesus, are brought to the banquet by the Holy Spirit. At Jesus' table, they both receive more than crumbs, but take part in the ongoing Eucharistic feast of Jesus' body and blood. These people are you, dear baptized!

But that does not preclude any excuses. Congregations are "filled" with members who, week-after-week, deny the need for this heavenly feast. Week-after-week, they confess by their absence and by their silence that they don't need Jesus and the forgiveness that He has won for them on the cross, and gives to them through the means of Word and Sacrament. They despise preaching and His Word, they do not hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it. Look around at all of the empty seats, and you know who is missing, who has been missing for a long time, and why it is that they refuse to come.

Maybe they are you.

The excuses spoken are little different from what the three people in the parable stated. "I just couldn't get up this morning, so I'll have to be excused." "I just bought something new, and I need the time to set it up and test it, so I'll have to be excused." "I just got married, and I cannot come." In every single case, whether the excuses spoken just now are familiar or not, the lure of something else is stronger and more desirable than the desire for the forgiveness of sins. In every single case, the confession is that you are not so sinful that you need Jesus and the forgiveness that He was won for you on the cross.

Dear hearers, you are not immune from this thought and desire. Week-after-week, the desire to stay home from the Divine Service exists. If it were up to you, you would treat Sunday or any other day gathered around the Word of God and the Sacraments as just another day—a day, most likely, of leisure and pleasure. The temptation is strong every week—every day—to regard yourself as good enough to get into the grace of God on your own merit and strength.

But you cannot. You are completely powerless to do anything to effect your salvation. Left up to you, you would be damned.

Therefore, thanks be to God that it is not up to you.

I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers. On the Last Day He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ. This is most certainly true.

The Holy Spirit is still at work bringing and compelling people to come to the banquet. These people are all sinners, and the Spirit is at work to bring them to the banquet in order that, daily and richly, He would forgive all of your sins.

Rev. Dr. Arthur A. Just, Jr. writes, "This parable reiterates that Jesus' table fellowship is *with sinners...*" (Luke 9:51—24:53, 577) Rev. Matthew Harrison once said something along the lines of, "Jesus lives in the hearts of sinners, so you better be one." In other words, as Jesus says, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." (Luke 5:31-32) Those who have no need for Jesus will not taste of the banquet, but the sinners who are compelled and brought to the table.

Dear hearers, look around you once again. See not the empty seats, but those which have an occupant, including your own. You are those whom the Holy Spirit has compelled and brought to this place—sinners, the lot of you. But you have been brought to this place in the presence of God and His Christ, whereupon you have confessed your sins and received absolution, and in a while, you will take place in the foretaste of the banquet to come. The Holy Spirit is at work this day, as every day, richly forgiving you for all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.