

**“He dispatched his servants to summon the invited guests...BUT ...they refused to come.”**

*In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

**Once upon a time**, actually in ancient times, a king would first announce an approximate time for a wedding, then, as the day grew closer, the king would send out the exact time and date. To say **‘yes’** to the initial invitation and then **‘no’** to the later, exact date, was a terrible insult.

The audience for whom Jesus intended this parable was the Jewish people of his time. You see, ages before, they had accepted God’s invitation to be his chosen people—his special guests at the banquet of the Kingdom of God. **BUT**, and there’s that proverbial **BUT** in life, my friends, when Jesus came to announce the actual banquet, they rejected his exacting invitation...a terrible insult.

So, as you can see, it is quite clear how Jesus’ parable, which I just read to you from the Gospel of St. Matthew, applied to the Jews of Our Lord’s day, in the 1<sup>st</sup> century.

**BUT** (again), how does it apply to us, **today**? What message is contained therein for you and me in this 21<sup>st</sup> century? **“What’s he saying to us through this parable”**—you ask?

**Well, I am glad you asked that question!**

Looking at this parable, the Jews **had accepted** the king’s initial invitation. Then we learn that many of them **had a change of heart** about attending. For example, one decided to go and work on his farm. Another decided to attend to some business. Note, these two didn’t go off and get drunk or commit some horrible crime. They changed their focus, their priorities...and, simply, decided to do something else.

I think it is exactly **here**, where the lesson is for us—in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Remember, for the majority of people in this room, those in our viewing area, and within the sound of my voice, we have all accepted God’s invitation ...first in Baptism, then in Communion, and especially in Confirmation. We said **‘yes’** to God’s invitation ...to be his guests at his eternal banquet.

That **‘yes’** to God’s invitation is not a mere, one-time commitment. That **‘yes’** represents an on-going commitment to an on-going process. It’s like the **‘I do’** of marriage. The **‘I do’** isn’t the end of the process...it’s just the beginning! It requires constant re-commitment and daily updating. Our commitment to God must continually grow, too, otherwise, it will simply atrophy and die. Just like in marriage, the worst poison is the loss of interest ... **‘just—not—caring’** anymore.

So-o ...let’s **take the Eucharist**, this liturgy we are attending right now. Does it mean more to us **today** than it did, say a year or two ago? If not, why not?

Or **take the Word of God**. Do we listen to it carefully, seriously try to apply it to our daily life? Or ...do we listen to it, file it away somewhere in the back of our mind, and forget all about it when we leave this room?

What good are the **Scriptures** ...if we don’t **internalize** them?

What good is this **Eucharist** ...if we don’t **internalize** Christ’s love for us?

We are not good, Catholic-Christians simply because we go to church or view/listen to the Mass regularly. We don’t become real, Catholic-Christians by going to church or viewing and listening to the Mass regularly any **more** ...than we become real cars by standing in our garages!

Going to church, **regularly**, participating at Mass, **regularly**, is just a **part of the process**, like the **‘I do’** of a marriage ...it’s only a part, the beginning of an ongoing process.

To the point of internalizing the Word of God (which you may think is not especially important):

**Once upon a time**, a protestant minister was locking up his church at nighttime. To his surprise, he found a 12 year-old boy sleeping in one of the pews. He woke the boy apologetically and told him he was locking up and that he had to leave. The boy confessed he had nowhere to go and had hoped to remain in the church for the night. The minister explained that that was not a good idea, **BUT** invited the boy to his office to make better arrangements for him. The minister called the two, charitable centers for the homeless in town, **BUT**, unfortunately, neither had any vacancies for that night. The minister apologized to the boy, who hung his head, shook hands with the minister, thanked him, and slipped out into the dark of the night.

When the minister got home, he told his wife of the disturbing incident with the boy. She said:

**“For heaven sakes, why didn’t you bring the boy home? We have a guest room, you know.”**

The minister, dumbfounded, said, sorrowfully:

**“Well, it’s too late now.”**

With that, he went to his study, stared into the crackling fireplace, & recalled our Lord’s words:

**“I was a stranger ...and you did not welcome me into your home.”**

This time, it was the minister who hung his head –and rightly so!

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Today’s Gospel reading is an invitation to take a long, hard look at ourselves and to ask ourselves if, perhaps, we are a bit like that good-meaning, God-fearing minister. I mean, do we listen attentively to God’s Word at Mass, **BUT** fail to internalize and apply it in our lives, let it take-root in our hearts, in our thinking and acting?

Or, are we like two of the men in today’s Gospel parable? Are we becoming so involved in the affairs and banquets of this life ...that we are forgetting about or ‘just—not---caring’ anymore ... ..about affairs and the banquet of eternal life?

No one can answer such questions for us; only we can answer them. **BUT**, answer them we must. For, how we answer them --or not-- could make an eternity of difference later!

I now close with this prayer:

**Lord, help us learn from the two men in today’s parable.  
Like them, we too, have accepted your invitation to the banquet of eternal life.  
Help us avoid making the same mistake they did.  
Keep us from getting so caught up in the affairs of this life  
that we forget about or ‘stop caring about’ eternal life.  
You gave each of us an Immortal soul at the moment of conception  
with an intellect and a free will.  
Help us to learn to make the right choices in life  
and to learn from our wrong choices in life.  
We have come to see the treasures of your banquet.  
Help us to always find our way ...in—your—way.**

May our Almighty, all knowing God, our Abba, bless you...  
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.