

EXTENDING THE LORD'S INVITATION (Luke 14:16–24)

In the last year or two (I don't remember exactly), when we discussed this same Gospel passage, I told a story about my wedding, where we invited around 1000 people. I said metaphorically that in that part of the world when you have a wedding, you invite "the whole village." In fact, I didn't know many of our wedding guests, but that was okay. What I did know was that they came from all social strata, ranging from poor to rich, including Christians and non-Christians.

However, not all weddings in my homeland are like that. There is a segment of our society that invites only people from the same social stratum as themselves. I apologize if the following terms may offend you, but some refer to them as "Crazy Rich."

The term suggests that these individuals are very, if not extremely, wealthy compared to the rest of society. Obviously, I have never been invited to any of their wedding parties. It's not just about adhering to a dress code at events like these; among the unwritten rules, their handbags must be of the "Hermes" brand. They must arrive in very expensive cars, which most people couldn't afford even with a lifetime's salary, and wear certain high-fashion clothing. Yes, it is known that their wedding parties can cost up to tens of millions of US dollars. If you belong to this society and someone invites you to their wedding party, you better reciprocate by inviting them to yours.

In the Gospel message we just read, Jesus told us about a "Crazy Rich" and powerful "lord" who held a wedding banquet and invited his very wealthy friends. But you might ask, 'How do you know his friends are wealthy?' Well, consider this: the first man bought land without examining

it first. What kind of a modest person with a right mind would ever do that? The second man bought five yokes of oxen, implying he owned a farm well over a hundred acres in size. The average farmer in that area has only three to six acres.

In ancient Palestine, declining a party invitation without a legitimate excuse was viewed as an insult of monumental proportion. It was seen as an intentional social shaming or disapproval. If you ever did that to your "crazy rich" friend, they would do everything in their power to retaliate against you. And I'm not just talking about not attending your party; I mean actual punishment.

But instead of seeking revenge in anger, this "lord" did something remarkable: he extended the invitation to the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and even those living outside the city walls, which includes us. My brothers and sisters, let no one misunderstand this. None of us belong to our Lord's "circle of rich friends." We all are like the people living outside the city walls. As I mentioned last week, originally, none of us was deemed worthy of the salvation thought to belong to Israel. We were not qualified, but we have been made qualified.

Let no one misunderstand this: our invitation is not based on our inherent qualities, not because we are good people, nor due to our heritage, ethnicity, nation of origin, tradition, political affiliation, or even sexual orientation. We are not invited to create another exclusive club that excludes everyone else. If you ever adopt an "us versus them" attitude, I have bad news for you: in our Lord's eyes, we are all "them.". We have absolutely no reason to feel superior to anyone else.

Those whom you consider "them" are also invited and are coming to the same banquet. This church, the Catholic Church, was never meant to

be an exclusive club for people with similar hobbies, interests, or social strata. It was established as the Lord's banquet hall, a place where everyone is invited to the Lord's party. Have you ever opened your house to complete strangers? It's uncomfortable, isn't it? You don't know who they are, and you're unsure of what they might do to your home. But it's something you'd better get accustomed to.

"But the Church is also a place of transformation," you might say, "the Lord loves us so much that He doesn't leave us where we are." That's true. However, what kind of doctor would loathe a patient who comes to him, regardless of how severe their condition is? It is our job to help them heal. If they never come to Christ, they will never experience healing.

My brothers and sisters, we, the Church, are not called to be a comfortable place just for the very fine people. In His Incarnation, our Lord became one of us—the sick, the suffering, and the needy. The Lord doesn't particularly care about his very fine friends. We are called to help Him extend His invitation to our fellow poor, maimed, lame, and blind so that we all can fill the banquet hall and partake in our Lord's supper. That is the true essence of Christmas.

Glory to Jesus Christ!

Patristic References:

St. Augustine of Hippo (354–430 AD):

"Sermons": Augustine often spoke about the universal call of the Church, emphasizing that God's grace is extended to all people, regardless of their social status or background.

St. John Chrysostom (347–407 AD):

"Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew": Chrysostom discusses the parables of Jesus, including those that highlight the inclusivity of the Kingdom of God, inviting all to partake in God's grace.

St. Gregory the Great (540–604 AD):

"Homilies on the Gospels": Gregory's teachings frequently touch on the mercy and openness of God's call, urging Christians to embrace and extend this invitation to others.

St. Basil the Great (330–379 AD):

"On Social Justice": In his teachings on social justice, Basil highlights the responsibility of Christians to reach out to the marginalized and the poor, reflecting the inclusivity of the Gospel.

St. Ambrose of Milan (340–397 AD):

"On the Duties of the Clergy": Ambrose addresses the role of the Church in being a place for all, emphasizing the need to welcome and support those from different backgrounds.

St. Clement of Alexandria (150–215 AD):

"The Instructor" (Paedagogus): Clement writes about the Christian way of life, including the necessity of showing love and hospitality to all people as a reflection of God's universal invitation.

St. Irenaeus of Lyons (130–202 AD):

"Against Heresies": Irenaeus, in his defense of Christian doctrine, underscores the universality of Christ's redemption, which is offered to all humanity.

St. Justin Martyr (100–165 AD):

"First Apology": Justin writes about the Christian faith being open to all, regardless of their previous beliefs or social standing.