

Reading Matthew 22.1-14

And Jesus answered and spoke to them again in parables, saying,

² "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king, who gave a wedding feast for his son.

³ "And he sent out his slaves to call those who had been invited to the wedding feast, and they were unwilling to come.

⁴ "Again he sent out other slaves saying, 'Tell those who have been invited, "Behold, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and my fattened livestock are *all* butchered and everything is ready; come to the wedding feast."

⁵ "But they paid no attention and went their way, one to his own farm, another to his business,

⁶ and the rest seized his slaves and mistreated them and killed them.

⁷ "But the king was enraged and sent his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and set their city on fire.

⁸ "Then he said to his slaves, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy.

⁹ 'Go therefore to the main highways, and as many as you find *there*, invite to the wedding feast.'

¹⁰ "And those slaves went out into the streets, and gathered together all they found, both evil and good; and the wedding hall was filled with dinner guests.

11 "But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw there a man not dressed in wedding clothes,

12 and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?' And he was speechless.

13 "Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

14 "For many are called, but few *are* chosen." (Mat 22:1-14 NAS)

Sermon.

Why does Jesus speak in parables?

Jesus uses the style of the parable when he is speaking of the Kingdom of God.

The use of a parable enables him to give his listeners some glimpses of understanding into the will of his Father; it enables him to describe in some way this Kingdom which we are promised.

He tries to describe the indescribable, he wants to enable us to

imagine the unimaginable. He links the infinite transcendence of God and his eternity to our human limitations and to our temporal nature. Through realistic images, little stories, anecdotes, he gives flesh to the Kingdom. Through his parables, he brings the Kingdom of God into our world. The parables should not be read as moral lessons, like the story of a naughty little boy and his mother : I didn't have such lessons at school, but I imagine that many of you have benefitted from moral lessons of some sort. In any case, the parables are not this sort of story; they speak not of morality but of the Kingdom.

What do we learn about the Kingdom of God from this parable about a wedding ?

In this kingdom a great celebration is being prepared, a grand wedding.

The king celebrates the wedding of his son.

Imagine what is involved in the marriage of a prince in ancient times: weeks of parties, spectacles, religious ceremonies, banquets, and so on.

The Kingdom of God is therefore a festive kingdom, a kingdom of celebration: the biggest celebration that we can imagine, as is the celebration of the marriage of a prince of a kingdom. We still talk about the celebrations at Versailles given for the marriage of the future Louis XV1.

The Lord of this kingdom wishes for the biggest and the fullest celebration possible.

He invites a great number of guests; guests that he has chosen because he wants to celebrate with them the most joyous of events. He wants to offer them a moment of marvellous joy and happiness; an eternity of joy and happiness, if we are talking of the Kingdom of God.

He invites powerful people who ignore his invitation, even mistreating his messengers. Do you know the word for messenger in Greek ? It is 'angelo', 'angel'.

So God sends his angels to invite powerful people to join him in the jubilation of his Kingdom, promising them the greatest of festivities.

Some of them pretend not to hear, others violently oppose the angels; they do not want to join in the celebrations, they are too occupied with their own affairs. And anyway, at such a celebration, will they not risk coming across their rivals or their enemies ?

For celebration, let us use the word 'Peace'; an intolerable situation for powerful people as we can imagine.....

Let us imagine that it is the powerful people of our world who receive this invitation today : « Come to the wedding, the Lord is celebrating the marriage of his son ! » How would they answer ?

« I haven't got the time, there is a crisis to manage. »

Even so, many powerful people acknowledge the Lord as their Lord. Some even depend on this Lord to impose the laws of their country, some say they receive the order to go to war from this Lord, some decide to go to war in order to open the way of this Lord : then, as if by chance, they listen.

It seems to me that it was the same for the powerful people who were invited to the table of the king in the parable. They obeyed him when it came to applying repressive laws, raising an army, or imposing taxes, but they had other things to do when it came to celebrating with the Lord.

The Lord invites his people: those he trusts, those he watches over, those he protects: he invites those he knows particularly well, and those with whom he can communicate.

God invites his people, his church, into his Kingdom to celebrate with him. He invites those who pray, those who already know how to recognise his signs, but maybe this is not the right moment for them. They have things to do, they are busy harvesting the fruits of the earth, they are trying to put their lives in order.

And so the day arrives when those who believe themselves to be close to God, those who consider themselves among the elected

elite, among the guests of honour; they are those who will not listen to the invitation of God.

For indeed, this invitation is hard to hear.

It can come at a bad moment.

It seems to be so foolish, that we do not pay attention.

To be invited to the table of the Lord ?

We could only dream of this...

And yet we will be gathered there during this service.

Is it not this that we, as Christians, hope for with all our hearts ?

Would we really accept this encounter ?