

II TRINITY 2015

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

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1 JOHN 3.13 St. LUKE 14.16



What if...we planned a special dinner...we sent out many invitations...we hired the caterer to prepare the food...when everything was ready and the tables were set...we called our friends to come and enjoy the food and friendship. What if...no one came? All of our work was for nothing!

One friend said he couldn't come because he had some work to do around the new house he just bought. Another friend said she just bought a new car and wanted to take a long drive in the country. Another friend said he just got married and they were on their honeymoon.

The friends in our updated version of the Parable of the Great Feast showed they didn't think enough of our friendship or the invitation to join us for dinner to set their own plans aside for what was clearly a special occasion. Their reasons for not being able to come are weak...even ridiculous. Our anger toward them would be completely justified.

In his book *The Hospitality of God: A Reading of Luke's Gospel* Father Brendan Byrne says the whole purpose of Luke's Gospel is to convey a message about God's hospitality and our tendency to find excuses for not embracing his hospitality. Jesus talks about God's hospitality through his parables, the short stories about everyday life people could understand, like the Parable of the Great Feast.

The Parable of the Great Feast is about God's extravagant hospitality available to us now and the invitation he sends out to everyone to join him and "sit down at the feast in the Kingdom of Heaven!" God never forces his hospitality on anyone...the choice to accept it is ours...how will we respond to his gracious invitation?

The question the Parable of the Great Feast asks us to consider is just how much do we value our relationship with God our Father? Do we recognize and respond to his extravagant hospitality? Do we appreciate Jesus' self-less sacrifice of love enough to **NOT** make excuses for our failures and to make necessary changes in our lives? Or are we content to just leave things as they are?

Attendance at Sunday Mass is the most visible way we show our acceptance of God's hospitality now and it should be a priority in our lives...not something we do when it's convenient. Jesus invites us to bring our cares and concerns and our sins to him so he can help us sort things out. He then invites us to feast on his own Body and Blood in the Sacrament of the Altar...a foretaste of the "Feast in the Kingdom of Heaven."

God has shown us extravagant hospitality and unconditional love in the forgiveness of our sins through Jesus. If we take his hospitality and love seriously, we will want to do what Saint John tells us to do in today's Epistle when he writes..."Our love should not be just words and talk; it must be true love, which shows itself in action." We too need to show extravagant hospitality and unconditional love toward others.

We can resist God's hospitality and love and forgiveness without realizing what we are doing or how much more complicated we are making our lives. Father Massey Shepherd writes in the *Oxford American Prayer Book Commentary* that we should not be overly scrupulous about ourselves and our sins and fall into the trap of thinking we do not or cannot measure up to God's demands.

Saint John tells us we know we are being truthful with God and with ourselves when we take Jesus' commandment to love others as much as he loves us seriously. To love God is to love others is to love God and to work for the good of others. Self-condemnation or self-pity because we think we are not good enough to please God really means we are refusing God's forgiveness and his invitation to the Great Feast.

Here's what God's invitation reads: *You are invited to dine with me from now through all eternity. Believe in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And dine with Jesus as your host. To live in heaven eternally, all you have to do is RSVP...Yes!*

What if...we stop making excuses and embrace God's love and hospitality right now? Let's not wait any longer to answer the invitation to "sit down at the Feast in the Kingdom of Heaven." We have every reason to say...**YES!**

