

II TRINITY 2017

SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH

FATHER CRAIG LOONEY

1 JOHN 3.13 St. LUKE 14.16



God's hospitality is extravagant...beyond anything we can imagine...why would anyone turn God down the invitation to experience his hospitality?

The Parable of the Great Feast is a lesson in God's extravagant hospitality. We certainly experience his hospitality now...and hope to experience it in the fullest one day in heaven.

Father Brendan Byrne, SJ, author of The Hospitality of God: A Reading of Luke's Gospel, writes the whole purpose of the Parables is to teach us how to better experience God's hospitality now.

We can better understand the Parable of the Great Feast when we know where Jesus is when he tells the story. Jesus is a dinner guest of an important community...and many other important community leaders are present.

Jesus notices how some of the arriving guests are scrambling to get the best seats at the dinner table...we get the impression Jesus is sitting somewhere else...not in close proximity to the host.

Jesus then gives us a lesson in humility...don't go rushing to get the best seat at the table...you might be asked to move...then you will be embarrassed and humiliated. Instead...take another seat...the host might have you take a seat closer to him.

The Parable of the Great Feast is ultimately a story about heaven...the invitation to live with God in his house in the place Jesus tells us in John's Gospel he has gone to get ready for us. We might conclude table manners have something to do with getting into heaven.

While Jesus watches the mad scramble for the best seats in the house, he offers a commentary on who should get invited to dinner in the first place...not the respectable important community leaders or the upper echelon of society...instead invite those least likely to get invited at all...the poor and disabled and marginalized members of society...because they have no way of repaying the honor.

Most of us would be pleased just to get an invitation to a friend's house for dinner. The host in the Parable of the Great Feast is a community leader...but his guests make light of the invitation. They show great disrespect for the host and dismiss the invitation as unimportant. The excuses they make for not coming are unkind at best.

The host then sends his employees out into the dark streets and even darker alleys of the city to bring back the poor and physically challenged people. They were the last people who would have expected to be asked to the Great Feast...they had the wrong pedigree. Even total strangers got a place at the host's table. Now there were no empty seats.

The question the Parable of the Great Feast asks us to consider is just how much do we value God's extravagant hospitality? God should be our first priority, even when attending Sunday Mass, daily prayer, or acts of kindness and compassion interfere with our busy lives.

And when it comes to humility and hospitality...they go hand-in-hand...and we can't opt out of showing either. The host in the Parable filled all of the seats at his Great Feast with the dregs of society. Those who were left out...those from the upper echelon of society...made a conscientious choice to be excluded.

The Parable of the Great Feast is about God's invitation going out to everyone to be his guest for eternity in heaven. It is not a story about rich people losing out and poor people winning based on their individual economic circumstances. It is a story about the attitude we have toward God and others...God excludes no one...people can exclude themselves.

God's extravagant hospitality is free and unearned...what that means is everyone gets the best seats in his house...and there are enough of the best seats for everyone...but we have to want to accept God's gracious invitation...and to accept it with humility and gratitude.

