

## Ordinary 28A 2014

In today's Gospel Jesus describes the kingdom of God as a great banquet to which God freely and generously invites us. The kingdom is like a wedding feast that a king gave for his Son. The king spares no expense. There is an abundance of food and drink—more than the guests can consume. Everything is ready. Everything is prepared, and now it is time for those who have been invited to come to the banquet prepared for them. But one by one the invited guests excuse themselves. They have something better to do—something that is more pressing, something more urgent. And so the king fills his banquet hall with other guests.

With this parable, Jesus reminds us that we are those other guests who were invited at the last hour. He reminds us of the abundance of God's mercy and love. The kingdom of God is not for the few; it is for all who accept the invitation.

As I reflected on this parable, I asked myself how it might apply to our present situation. I asked myself how Jesus might preach this parable today if he came to Simsbury. Perhaps he would say something like this. "A king gave a great feast for his son and invited everybody. At first everybody came to the feast, but then, one by one, people began to excuse themselves and leave the banquet because they had other things to do, things they thought more pressing, more urgent, more important. Soon the banquet hall was nearly empty. Aware of what was happening, and saddened that so many people no longer enjoyed the banquet

he had prepared for them, the king sent out a second invitation to the same people because he loved them and wanted them to enjoy the banquet he had prepared.”

Here is the meaning of the new parable. The king is God the Father. The banquet is the gift of the Eucharist that we celebrate in the community of the church, and we are the people. As in the parable, many people have left the banquet of the Eucharist because they are busy about other things; and so they have forgotten the joy of the banquet. So what are we to do? We are to welcome them back; we are to invite them once more to the banquet where they can enjoy the richness of God’s love.

We are now in the midst of our Welcome Back Program at St. Mary’s. In the week ahead you will be receiving a brochure about our Welcome Back Program, and you will see more and more advertisements about it. The purpose of the program is to welcome back those who no longer practice their faith for whatever reason. We do not seek to judge them; we simply seek to welcome them back to the faith so that they can enjoy the banquet one more.

But if we are to welcome them back, all of us need to be involved; and this is where I need your help. I need you to extend a personal invitation to people you know no longer practice their faith. I need you to tell them about our program, to invite them to explore their faith once more time. I need to you to explain that this may be a moment of God’s grace for them, to welcome them back.