



God of Hospitality

Philippians 4:1-9; Matthew 22:1-14

Many of you will remember when mass was celebrated in Latin in the Roman Catholic Church. If any of you grew up and attended mass during that time, you may recall feeling torn between a feeling of awe as you were attracted to the mystery of offering praise in a language you did not quite understand and a sense of frustration for not being able to fully participate, feeling cut off and out of place like not totally belonging.

I grew up in the aftermath of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). At the end of the Council, the Church elected to have all the prayers in vernacular: each could participate and enjoy mass in their own language. In the '70s, I still could hear older people praying the rosary in the only way they had learned it: a mix of Latin and Neapolitan. And because by then I had studied some Latin in high school, I had to hide my smiles at prayers pronounced with utter devotions.

Mass in Latin was an almost 2000-year-old tradition that the Catholic church let go of for the purpose of inclusion and a fuller participation by the faithful. Those of you who travel abroad understand the advantage of searching for a service in English. People want to participate, they want to understand, they want to belong. This is the basics of hospitality: people want to feel welcome and included: no language barriers, or physical obstacles, or spiritual judgments. Churches pride themselves on being warm and welcome. Are they also hospitable and inclusive?

The gospel uncovers an important truth: those worthy in the eyes of the world are deemed not ready to eat with the Lord at the grand wedding banquet. Servants are sent out to invite people from all walk of life to come to the banquet. Notice how the servants are sent out to invite and were not simply waiting to host. There is an active effort, an initiative, a

plan. There were those who prepared the meal, those who prepared the hall, and those who went out to invite.

How do we steward our hospitality? We may say, “Everyone is welcome,” but “welcome” and “invitation” are two very different things. Being welcome to attend and being invited to attend each have unique implications: welcome is a general “admit all” whereas invitation means “we want *you* and your ideas and your hopes and dreams for us and with us.” There is intentionality. Which of these does our congregation extend? This is generosity that goes the extra mile.

The servants who went out had a clear message: the king is generous and invites all to the feast: will you come? The servants knew their place and did the bidding of the king. They were aware that the king had something to give away in extravagant abundance and they faithfully carried out the king’s command. Their labor was not to benefit themselves but the guests.

Imagine you are the beggar receiving the king’s invitation. imagine receiving that honor, that opportunity. Imagine you haven’t had a decent meal in ages. How would you feel? Will that transform you? Would you be grateful? Would you feel inspired to extend generosity? Or would you simply show up and take advantage of the situation? What difference would the invitation make in your life?

Let us be clear about the mission of the Church: the goal is not to feel good about ourselves or go back to a time when attendance was larger or to increase the donations to pay the bills. We are here for others and when we serve others we help ourselves to see God at work.

Let us praise God for the lavish generosity of God towards all of us.
Amen.