

28th Sunday of Ordinary Time – Cycle A (October 9, 2011)

Everyone is invited to the banquet but not all are welcomed: the man at the end of the parable is not only excluded but thrown out in a most violent manner. These are difficult words for our politically-correct ears. And all because he wasn't wearing the proper clothes. What is really going on here?

A few weeks ago, a disturbing article appeared in the Tribune describing how a family who lives right around the corner on Sheffield was awakened early one morning to over 40 police officers in a raid that accused them of several criminal violations. Misdemeanors and two arrests were issued but there was no evidence of other suspected criminal activities. According to the article, there was no evidence of dog fighting, guns or drug dealing.

It is clear that problems at this address existed, but is this the way of dealing with the problem, with 40 police officers? This family has lived here for forty years, when this neighborhood was not "desirable." Now that the land and area is worth a whole lot of money, let's just remove those who don't look right or "dress" the part. We want our neighborhood to look beautiful according to our standards and anyone who doesn't quite fit in is made to feel so.

We have been serving the poor and homeless for years through our loaves and fishes dinners and our food distribution program. These ministries bring in people who don't seem to look the part...they are an eyesore to some of our neighbors. Would there be any negative reaction if every Friday morning at 8:00 A.M. twenty of our parishioners lined up outside the parish center waiting to get inside for a weekly breakfast? We don't welcome people through the back door along the alley where the garbage is kept. This is a city, not a gated community; we are a half a block away from a busy street where many different kinds of people come. And the people who urinate in the alley or on the front lawn are certainly not restricted to those who are homeless, nor is the vulgar language. When these things occur, the police should be called.

We go back to the question: why was the man thrown out of the wedding feast? It had nothing to do with his external clothes but with the condition of his soul: he wasn't wearing the baptismal clothes of mercy, compassion, justice and tolerance. We are all "clothed" spiritually, clothes given to us at our baptism, that unite us or "wed" us to Christ the "Bridegroom" of the Church and of our souls. If we aren't "dressed" properly, we can't partake of the wedding feast because we aren't in love with Christ. He is not the Lord of our lives when our self-centered need to have it all on our terms is the guiding force.

The Liturgy is a lived and dynamic experience of our worship of the Father through Christ in the Spirit...a worship that is meant to convert us and "clothe" our souls in humility, the virtue that reminds us that we are all that family awakened by pounding doors and a huge police force...we are those people lining up waiting for food or to be fed.

Christ invites us to the feast in His Kingdom at every moment of our lives. The beautiful image from the first reading of Isaiah describing the Feast at the end of time : when *all* nations and people will gather together...when *all* will be "clothed" properly...when *all* tears will be wiped away, is one in which we strive to make happen *now* in this community of faith and at every Eucharist. We invite everyone and let God worry about who is excluded. Perhaps the people who look so disheveled and dirty will be leading us all into the Kingdom at the end of the world. Maybe they will be doing the inviting...a touch of gospel irony.