

A Reading from the Holy Gospel
According to Matthew

Matthew 22:7ff

And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying,²“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a marriage feast for his son,³and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the marriage feast; but they would not come.⁴Again he sent other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who are invited, Behold, I have made ready my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves are killed, and everything is ready; come to the marriage feast.’⁵But they made light of it and went off, one to his farm, another to his business,⁶while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them.⁷The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city.⁸Then he said to his servants, ‘The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy.’⁹Go therefore to the thoroughfares, and invite to the marriage feast as many as you find.’¹⁰And those servants went out into the streets and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good; so the wedding hall was filled with guests.

¹¹“But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment;¹²and he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless.¹³Then the king said to the attendants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth.’¹⁴For many are called, but few are chosen.”

The Gospel of The Lord

The following numbered outlines summarizes the reading from the gospel of Matthew. Teachers following the youth track may wish to cover all of these points or just one or several. The key insight to emphasize with the young people is that we have received an invitation from God and how we respond will determine where we spend eternity. There is a mystery regarding the strong reaction of God to those who reject the invitation but the bottom line is that God respects the choices that we make. Our freedom is our dignity but it is also a responsibility. We need God's help to help us choose wisely. Left to ourselves who we tend to make dumb choices and are dull to the truth that choices have consequences. We like to pretend that nothing really matters. But it does! We listen to too many voices which say everything is fine, nothing really matters, there are no real consequences. We need to listen to Jesus who warns in a parable like this that rejecting or making light of the invitation to walk with God has serious consequences. Tonight's hymn and says, "my hope is built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame but wholly lean on Jesus name. On Christ the solid rock I stand all other ground is sinking sand all other ground is sinking sand. Here they follow the outline to follow and reflecting on the readings along with some suggested thoughts.

1. **The Desire of the King -**

1. Verses 1 – 4

2. Teach the children that

1. the King is God the father,

2. the son is Jesus.

3. The marriage feast of the son means several things:

1. **At one level it is the invitation to celebrate with God and his kingdom.** The kingdom of God is a place where God has authority and is able to protect us. It has rules, yes but ultimately it is a place of celebration and joy where we enjoy the presence of God and the life increasingly free of sin and the sorrows that come with it. You might ask, especially older children, if they see the Church as merely a place for rules or as a place to enjoy and celebrate the fact that God loves us and wants to free us from sin

2. **At another level it is the Church** where the presence of God and his teachings are celebrated and experienced.

3. **At another level, The wedding feast is also a symbol of the Mass.** The church, which is the bride of Christ, celebrates every Sunday with the groom and her husband, Jesus.

4. The servants are the apostles and disciples who summon family and friends to come to the God's Kingdom (the marriage feast). In a way, the servants are people like our priests and religious sisters. People like our believing parents and grandparents who call us to live good lives, get to church, read the Bible, and pray. The servants of God are those whom God sends to call us to follow him. You might ask the children who some of the servants of God are in their lives. How do they call the children to come to the kingdom of God? What are some things they say?

2. The Disrespect of the Invited

1. Verses 5-6

2. Notice how the invited guests respond! Some make light of it and claim they have other more important things to do. Others laugh at and scorn the servants who make the invitation. Others retaliate and attack the servants! Still others even go so far as to kill the servants! Ask the children to reflect on how they themselves may have done things like this. Likewise some of their friends may have done this. Many young people make light of going to church, they claim they have more important things to do. Sometimes they claim the Church or prayer, or reading Scripture is boring or silly, or a waste of time. Sometimes people laugh at and scorn priests and preachers, parents and teachers who encourage us to follow God. They call them out of touch and old-fashioned! Some people don't like to be told what to do and therefore attack those who speak the truth to them and love. Hopefully, none of our young people have been so angry as to have killed someone :-), but most of us have been angry enough from time to time that we wish someone was dead. Invite the young people to reflect on how they may have done some of these things. Isn't this a strange gospel? The people who were invited to a marriage feast reacted it so badly! But is it also a strange world that so many people react so badly when they are invited to accept God and his kingdom and the joy of it into their lives? Something is seriously wrong with us. We need a Savior who can save us from our own anger and stupid decisions. We need a Savior who can bring us to our senses so that we can know what is really good: things like love, justice, mercy, chastity, self-control, forgiveness, and knowing God. Ask the children if they know they need God and that something is deeply wrong (a desire for bad and stupid things) that needs healing.

3. The Destruction that Ensues -

1. Verse 7

2. Here is a very shocking and difficult to understand development. The King who moments ago was joyfully inviting people to attend the wedding feast now grows angry and destroys the town with those who rejected the invitation lived. Historically, Jesus was referring to the city of Jerusalem which largely rejected him. He had warned that their rejection would amount to a self-destructive decision. Sure enough, in 70 A.D. The Roman army attacked and destroyed Jerusalem and burned it. Had Jerusalem accepted the invitation of Jesus he could have led them in the ways of forgiveness and they would never have picked a fruitless war against the Romans. Instead of seeing the Romans as their enemies they would have seen the Romans as their friends and brothers. Instead, they rejected Jesus and his plan and chose instead the utter destruction of a foolish war. It is this way with us. If we reject God's invitation to allow him into our life to change us and transform us we will suffer ultimate destruction. We have very deep and sinful drives which will destroy us unless we allow God to help us. We have a Savior but we must choose to let him into our life in order for him to save us. We must follow his plan, or we can never be saved. Without his saving work our selfishness and greed, our lack of forgiveness and need for revenge, our sexual impurity and lack of self control, all of these things and more will destroy us. We have only one chance, to stand on Christ, the solid rock. All other ground is sinking sand. Ask the young people to reflect on this truth. Have they not in fact seen how destructive sin can be? Some of the older children may

already know companions who have made sinful choices and suffered great consequences. Maybe they know friends who been arrested, friends who are pregnant at 15, friends who are hooked on drugs, who have committed violence or been victims of violence because they ran with the wrong crowd. Even the youngest children can be taught to appreciate that sin brings very painful things into life. In refusing to accept God's invitation to live under his kingship and accept his plan for our life, we bring utter destruction on ourselves.

4. **The Determination of the King -**

1. Versus 8 – 10

2. Notice that the King (God) is determined to see the wedding feast as full as possible. So he asked his servants to redouble their efforts. Go and find everyone you can and invite them to the wedding feast (the kingdom of God, the Church, the mass)! God never gives up. He keeps calling! God wants to save as many of us as he can! See how much God loves us. He is the God of the second chance. He is the God whose love never fails. Even if some reject him, he does not reject us all, he just keeps calling. Ask the young people to reflect on how much God loves them. How have they experience that God does not give up? Ask them to reflect on the fact that God continues to sustain us even when we sin, he gives us time to repent. He still gives us food and shelter, air to breathe and sustains our bodily functions. Even if some utterly reject him, he does not reject us all, but treats us as individuals. Talk to the young people about God's steadfast love and your own life.

5. **The Demands of Discipleship**

1. Verses 11 – 14

2. But now comes another difficult moment. There is a man who, though he accepted the invitation to the wedding, refused to be properly dressed. You see, there are proper clothes to wear to a wedding, and there are clothes that are not proper. Remember, the wedding feast is the kingdom of God. There is a proper way for us to be dressed. The proper clothing here, refers not to the store bought clothes we wear but to the righteousness to which we are summoned. It is also important for us to understand that God provides us with the proper wedding garments. We should not understand that this man was somehow poor and could not afford the proper garments! God provides the garments as we read in the book of Revelation: *"It was given to her (the church) to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure, for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of all the Saints.* (Revelation 19:8). Notice then, the robe is given. It is not that the poor guy just happened to get caught unprepared, or was too poor to afford fine wedding clothes. He has refused to wear the garment that God offered him. And what is that garment? It is the garment of the new life, a garment of a reformed life, the garment of a holy and increasingly sin free life. It is possible, for some people to accept the invitation to come to church, to pray, etc. but then to refuse to heed what they hear in God's house. Some people like to live double lives. They say they love God, they call Jesus Lord, but do not do what he says. They give God lip service but do not really allow him to transform their lives. Ask the young people if they have noticed that some people talk about God but don't follow him. Ask them if they have struggled with the same problem. Sometimes we say we love God but we act very differently. Here too we must turn to the Lord Jesus who alone can save us. We need help because we are inconsistent and uncommitted. Only Jesus can give us the wedding garment we really need, the garment holiness and righteousness. This gospel

teaches us that we must be serious about asking this help from Jesus and serious about letting him transform our life because there will come a day of judgment. Here too, I would encourage you to speak to the children about consequences. Have they ever experienced a time when they were given a second chance but still did not do what was right? What was the result? Whether we like to admit it or not there are consequences in life. Part of growing up is accepting this fact. Ask the children to reflect on how much God loves us and wants to help us. But ask them also to reflect on the fact that if we refuse that help or resist it there will one day be terrible consequences. Ask them to pray for themselves and ask them to pray for others, for the Lord sadly teaches at the end of this gospel that many are called but only a few really choose to do what is right. We need God to help us do what is right. The final verse of the hymn we sang tonight is this: *“When he shall come with trumpet sound, oh may I then in him be found. Dressed in his righteousness alone, faultless to stand before his throne. On Christ the solid rock I stand all other ground is sinking sand, all other ground is sinking sand.”*