

INVITE TO THE WEDDING FEAST AS MANY AS YOU FIND – Biblical Commentary by F. Alberto Maggi OSM

Mt 22.1-14

And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. Again he sent other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.'

But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.' And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good.

So the wedding hall was filled with guests. "But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. And he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' For many are called, but few are chosen."

Jesus had announced to the High priests, the elders, the Pharisees, to the priestly caste in power and to the religious leaders that the kingdom of God would be taken from them. Now He explains why.

This is what Matthew teaches us in the first fourteen verses of chapter 22. So Jesus speaks to them again, to this category, and compares the kingdom of heaven to a king that gives a wedding feast. Jesus does not compare the kingdom of heaven to a liturgist assembly, to scenes that recall a temple, the liturgy, but to that of a more human and joyous feast, a wedding feast because in His reign the characteristic is one of joy and happiness.

God wanted mankind's happiness. And this is his son's wedding. He sends the servants to call all the people invited, but they do not want to come. Jesus underlines the stubborn refusal on the part of this

cast of powerful priests, the religious leaders, to the novel invitation that he proposes. The king is not discouraged and sends other servants.

In the servants there is the image of the prophets that God has tirelessly sent to his people, and continues trying to entice them with what was the best and most interesting part of the feast, the scrumptious meal. “*« I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. »*”

Therefore he attracts them with the most inviting part of the feast. But, the reply is “*...they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business,..*” and Jesus underlines yet again the refusal on the part of the religious authority and the spiritual leaders of the people to his novel proposal of the kingdom, it is due to the only God that they believe in, the only God that they worship: interest and convenience. All they do is for their own good, the good of the people does not interest them, therefore at the proposal of the kingdom they prefer their own field, their own affairs and interests and not the needs of the people. And Jesus warns them that their interests will be that which will bring ruin to all the population. But not only, “*....seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them.*” The fate of the prophets sent by God is to be always misunderstood, refused and persecuted by the religious authority. The reaction of the king is classical of the Old Testament of God’s anger against his enemies, that was the destruction of the city. And here there is the illusion of the destruction of Jerusalem, the city will be lost, it will be destroyed because of the religious leaders that have refused the Messiah of peace announced by Jesus.

Well the implication of the parable is that this kingdom, this wedding feast refused by the leaders and priests, will now be open to all. In fact, “*Then he said to his servants, «The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.»*”.

Not so. The Greek term used by the evangelist is important. He uses a Greek word that indicates the end of the city streets, there outside the city. Therefore the servants go out of the city and arrive to the boundaries of the kingdom. The announcement of the kingdom is now not only for the city, but everywhere. So they must go out of the city and go to all parts of the world.

This is Jesus’ invitation. And all are invited to this wedding feast. The offer of God’s love is for all humanity.

“Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.’ And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good.” First the bad and then the good. This corresponds to what Jesus had said of the Father’s love “*...that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good..*” (Matt.5, 45) therefore the good do not come before the bad, but all are invited. The offer of God’s love is in fact for all, especially for those that are in need.

“So the wedding hall was filled with guests. “But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment.” What is the meaning of this wedding garment? The book of

the Apocalypse comes to our help where it speaks of the wedding of the lamb and says that the linen dresses are works of the saints. The invitation to participate at the Kingdom is for all, we have said, but then, once inside this kingdom, conversion is required, a change of mentality that must be seen in the works.

And here there is one that has not done this change, this conversion. *“And he said to him, «Friend,... »”*. Three times friend appears in Matthew’s Gospel and it is always used in a negative sense; to the envious servant in the parable of the tenants, to Judah and then here. *“«...how did you get in here without a wedding garment?»”*

In the kingdom of God the condition of participation is the conversion. Jesus has already said: “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is near”. Conversion means to substitute the existing values with those proposed by Jesus. The kingdom of God is an alternative for the society where instead of accumulating there is sharing, instead of commanding there is service. And this must be seen through concrete actions.

“And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, «Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. »” The image is typical of the rabbinic language of the Bible, to indicate the failure of one’s own existence. The religious leaders, the High priests, the elders and the Pharisees, those that thought themselves nearest to God, the privileged of the kingdom, they did not enter, they were excluded. Their exclusion did not put an end to the project of love and happiness for mankind, but allowed it to be offered to the whole universe.

“For many are called,...” The offer of love is for all,.. *but few are chosen.* There are few that respond affirmatively, because to respond affirmatively means a change of life that is full of works that enrich the lives of others, works in favor of the good of mankind. Conversion means to put the good of mankind as the most important part of one’s existence, as an absolute value.

For this the religious authorities are excluded, because for them the most important asset is their own institution that they govern and defend.