HOMILY FOR 28TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

THEME: **THE WEDDING GARMENT**

Isaiah 25:6–10a; Psalm 23:1–6; Philippians 4:12–14, 19–20; Matthew 22:1–14.

We all live with the experiences of being invited either to a gala event, celebration of wedding reception, milestone birthday parties, educational achievement party or retirement from work. Whenever we decide to honor the invitation, the next issue to consider is whether we have the appropriate clothing for the invited party and what we will choose to bring as a gift to the celebrant.

In the Gospel today, Jesus presents a challenging parable of the wedding banquet that focuses not just on our coming into the party hall but putting on the appropriate garment of a heart transformed from within so as to be fit to enter the kingdom of heaven. He compares the kingdom of heaven to a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son and surprisingly at the end of the day, the people who were invited did not show up.

Many of those invited did not come because they were preoccupied with other cares of daily life: too busy with fields, business, work, sports, and family needs.

God always invites us to the table of plenty, the Eucharist but sometimes we have schedules that are filled up, family responsibilities, and a whole lot of things that makes us think that there is no room left even for God.

Today, Jesus reminds us in the Gospel that God is inviting ALL of us to the eternal banquet of heaven. But we need to put on the wedding garment of a converted heart to access this God's gift of salvation. (Acts 16:31, 2 Tm 2:4).

The Lord invites us to come to the feast of heaven and earth. To come to the table of plenty. God will provide for all that we need, here at the table of plenty. God invites everyone to the banquet of His Kingdom, but accepting His invitation requires a transformed heart and a life worthy of the grace we have received.

The wedding garment represents our response through daily conversion, consistent life in the spirit, rejection of sin, obedience to God's commandments and the demand of charity to the poor. These make us fit for the banquet in the heavenly kingdom.

Jesus offers the imagery of the kingdom of heaven at the end of time as a feast and wedding celebration with God the Father as the King, and Jesus as the Son. The wedding feast is evidence of the Lord's goodness and a symbol of his mercy and salvation.

The problem with those who didn't honor the invitation was that they allowed their ordinary pursuits to take precedence over the God's invitation. This is a form of idolatry.

Here and now, Jesus is inviting us to the table of the Eucharist with the nourishment that our soul needs (Jn 6:35, 52, 68-To whom shall we go outside of you Lord, you have the message of eternal life). The Holy Eucharist offers us the gift of salvation on the cross and forgiveness of our sins, comfort in sadness and strength for daily journey of faith (Lk 24:13-35). The Saints recognized this profound transformation that comes from the Holy Eucharist. This is an invitation to always come to receive Holy Communion with reverence, humility, gratitude and deep faith. The Eucharistic celebration gives us a foretaste of this heavenly banquet. At the altar, Christ feeds us with His Word and gives Himself to us in the Eucharist. We gather not because we are perfect, but because we need God's grace to attain the perfection of the saints (Rom 12:1-2).

St Paul captures it well by reminding us (R2- Phil 4:19) that our God shall supply all our needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. And Ps 23:5-6 beautifully puts it that surely God's goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our lives.

The Lord's invitation goes beyond fulfilling the obligation of merely attending Sunday masses. It is an invitation for a personal relationship with God (2 Cor 5:17). To respond to the invitation to the banquet by the Lord, we need to make a fundamental and daily choice of conversion of heart from sins which is the wedding garment that gives us access to the heavenly banquet (Matt 26:29-30). Jesus is telling us to come to the feast for all is ready.

One cannot but notice the sharp turn of events in the story of the wedding feast with respect to the man that came without the wedding garment. The Gospel told us that, 'The king notices a man who had entered the banquet without a wedding garment. He asks him: "How did you get in here, my friend, without a wedding garment?" (Mat 22:12) The man has no answer. This question is not merely about clothing. It is a question about the condition of the human heart, the authenticity of our faith, and the way we respond to God's daily invitation of salvation.

Today, Jesus is asking each one of us: Where is your wedding garment? Coming to Church is the first expression of responding to the invitation from God to us. But our lives need to reflect the holiness, love, justice, and mercy of the God whom we profess in worship.

The prophet Isaiah presents a beautiful vision of God's saving plan: "On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food." (Isa 25:6ff) This banquet is a sign of God's abundant generosity. He desires to gather His people, remove their shame, destroy death, wipe away tears, and bring them into the joy of His presence. Notice something important: God is the one who prepares the banquet.

We do not earn our way into God's Kingdom through our own achievements. We are invited because God is generous, merciful, and loving. However, the grace we receive should change us. We cannot continually receive the Bread of Life while deliberately refusing to share our bread with the hungry. We cannot celebrate the God of mercy while remaining committed to unforgiveness. We cannot sing about peace while deliberately creating division in our families and communities.

The banquet reveals the generosity of God, but it also challenges us to become people who reflect that generosity.

Every Mass is an invitation to encounter Christ and to allow Him to transform our lives. We must leave the altar more committed to love, reconciliation, justice, and service. Jesus' parable contains three major challenges of Christian vocation: God allows us freedom to choose eternal life or otherwise; the danger of prioritizing something else before God; and not allowing the Gospel transform our hearts which makes us religious but not converted.

Often, we can become so occupied with the gifts of God that we forget the God who gives them. But when our pursuit of success leaves no room for God, prayer, family, compassion, and service, something has gone wrong. Even in the Church, we can become so involved in activities that we lose touch with the spiritual purpose of those activities.

We can organize liturgies, meetings without growing in holiness. We can lead associations without practicing charity. We can preach forgiveness while refusing to forgive.

God's invitation reaches the poor, the forgotten, the wounded, the sinners, the rejected, and those whom society considers unimportant. The Church must therefore be a community of welcome.

We must ask ourselves: Does our parish welcome people who are poor, strangers and the vulnerable with open arms? Do we make room for people who have made mistakes and sincerely desire to change Do our parish communities reflect the hospitality of the King.

However, being invited is not the same as being transformed. God's welcome is generous, but His grace calls us to conversion. Hence the purpose of the parable is to wake us up by conversion of heart.

The Fathers of the Church are unanimous on the meaning of the man without the wedding garment: St. Augustine says: It is LOVE (Charity).* You can enter the Church by Baptism, but without love, you cannot stay for the feast of heaven. St. Gregory the Great says: It is the garment of GOOD WORKS and a transformed life.* Not just faith in name.

For us today: The Wedding Garment is a state of Grace, Sanctifying Grace — the white garment we received at Baptism (Gal 3:27). If we stain it with mortal sin and refuse Confession, we have no wedding garment.

Again, sometimes we want the feast (blessings, Holy Communion) but we refuse to change our clothes — to repent.

God is merciful — He invites even the worst sinner from the streets. But God is also just — He demands transformation. The wedding garment therefore reminds us that Christian life is a journey of conversion. We are not expected to present ourselves as perfect people. We are called to become people who are genuinely open to God's transforming grace.

Our love for God must become visible in our treatment of other people. The wedding garment is reflected in kindness, generosity, forgiveness, justice, and solidarity with those who suffer. Our wedding garment must not depend on our circumstances; it must reflect our relationship with Christ.

Christianity is not merely an invitation to enter God's house; it is an invitation to allow God to transform our hearts. Jesus challenges us not to merely ask whether we are in the Church. But to ask whether Christ is truly living in us (Gal 2:20). May we have the humility to examine our lives, the courage to repent of our sins, and the grace to live as true disciples of Jesus Christ.

As Jesus reminds us to come to the banquet for all is now ready, let us pray for the grace to constantly put on the appropriate wedding garment of constant transformation of our hearts and our lives by fully responding to God's invitation to amend our lives so as not to be sent out of the heavenly banquet, Amen.