

*May the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ enlighten the eyes of our hearts, so that we may know what is the hope that belongs to our call.*

Today both the prophet Isaiah and Jesus use the comforting imagery of a banquet to describe the kingdom of heaven. We are all invited to this feast.

A lot of things happen at meals besides eating. And when friends get together it can be a time of harmony and bonding, a time when people draw closer together such as gatherings at Thanksgiving, Christmas, birthdays and anniversaries. A meal is a powerful human moment. That's why a meal is used so often in the Bible as a symbol

of heaven, of the kingdom. Isaiah used the picture of a huge banquet on the Lord's mountain to illustrate God's purpose to reunite all nations and races torn apart by original sin. Jesus uses the image of a banquet in this parable to show that all people are invited to the kingdom of God.

We can accept or ignore or refuse this invitation. To refuse this invitation is to cut ourselves off from our supernatural life source. God doesn't force salvation on us. The invitation is given, but accepting the call is up to us.

What grabs our attention in this Gospel reading is the person at the end without a garment. That person accepted the invitation but was not properly dressed. That detail expresses an important caution for us. Receiving the invitation to life and communion with Christ is one thing. Staying in union with Him is something else. Accepting the invitation to the kingdom, to share God's life through Jesus Christ, means more than showing up in church and letting supernatural things happen to us. We have to do our part.

There is always the danger of what has been called "cheap grace," that is, seeking grace without obedience, grace without good works, grace without discipleship, grace without repentance, grace without any cost to us. In Jesus, the very life of God is offered to everyone, but only those who actually change their way of living to follow the Gospel will experience the



transforming power of God. We need to give up our old clothes and habits and put on the new clothes of Christian discipleship.

It is not just saying prayers but opening our hearts and lives to God in prayer that counts. It is not just the number of words we say or the elegance, the antiquity or the quality of the indulgence attached to a prayer. It's the kind of life and heart from which the prayer comes from that counts. These are the keys that unlock the door to the power of Christ, the kingdom

life for us. This gives us entry to the banquet of God's life.

We are all called but we have to accept that call. Our entry to the banquet is not just a baptismal call to which we or our parents responded years ago; we must wear the garments of our Baptism now. It's the baptismal life that counts not just the baptismal certificate.

So, the questions for all of us are: "Are we properly dressed for church? What kind of life do we bring to this Eucharistic banquet? What is the condition of our baptismal garment? Are our baptismal promises long forgotten and discarded? Is Baptism a memory or an active commitment shaping our lives and our priorities right now?" If our baptismal promises are still shaping our lives, if we accept the invitation to discipleship and come here clothed as one truly trying to live up to our call in Baptism, then at this sacred banquet of the Mass we will receive God's promise that eternal life is ours. We will receive His guarantee that He will be our strength to help us come to the banquet that will never end.

