Tr.2(2023)

**ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

Last Sunday was the Feast of St. Barnabas. A Jew from the isle of Cyprus, St. Barnabas was one of the earliest disciples of Jesus. The *Book of Acts* recounts that he sold some land he owned and laid the funds at the feet of the Apostles. Barnabas also was the one responsible for bringing the future Apostle Saul into the Church when others were terrified of him.

We all know of his early travels with St. Paul along the eastern Mediterranean. Initially he was the more famous of the pair. Early on his name appears first in the Book of Acts as "Barnabas and Saul". Later, almost all the references become all "Paul and Barnabas". These two along with St. Mathias, who replaced Judas, are the Apostles not chosen directly by Jesus during his earthly ministry. St. Paul, however, very much was chosen by Jesus AFTER his earthly life.

St. Barnabas took part in the Council of Jerusalem to help resolve the splintering issue of how to bring in Gentile converts. After Paul and Barnabas had a falling out over Mark's "spirit", Barnabas went with Mark back to Cyprus. He suffered martyrdom there about 61AD. Not surprisingly he is considered the father of the Cypriot church and patron saint.

Two writings are associated with him. The Gnostic *Epistle of Barnabas* which most scholars no longer believe was penned by him. Conversely, many today believe that St. Paul's *Letter to the Hebrews* may well have been the work of his colleague and confidant, Barnabas.

*“And they all with one consent began to make excuse”.*

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In Jesus' day, as in our own, invitations to great events were sent out long before the actual date. *Unlike* today the exact starting day was left open in this era before caterers, grocery stores, and refrigeration. Invitees just knew to keep several days open. Then when all was ready messengers announced the beginning, something we might handle today by phone, email or text.

Given the lack of definitiveness as to the starting time and date it certainly was possible for *unforeseeable* things to arise since the time of the invitation: illness or a sudden visitor from afar. Yet, Jesus did not relate that any of these people offered an excuse based upon a sudden, extraordinary interference.

Rather, all of these excuses were based upon something fairly foreseeable, controllable, or predictable. For example, while one never knows for certain when he might find a great deal on land or oxen, he nonetheless can arrange any transfer to occur at an harmonious time.

Likewise, a newly-wedded Jewish husband of that time enjoyed the benefit of exemption from **all** social and even military obligations during his honeymoon year. He would have been aware of such privilege when he **first** received the invitation.

Thus, when all those who implicitly had accepted started declining they were being quite insulting to the king. We too would feel insulted were people to pull out of a major party of ours at the very last second outside of an extraordinary reason.

Besides the original invitees two other groups of people were mentioned in this parable. They are the ones of whom the lord requested their presence **after** the insults from the first invitees began coming in.

First were those such as the lame, poor, and blind. While Jesus clearly references the Jewish leaders as the ***original*** invitees, this second group is an obvious reference to those **without** social stature, such as sinners. In other words they were the social outcasts.

But another group also ultimately gets invited as well, after the banquet hall is not yet filled: namely, the **wayfarers,** those on the highways and in the hedges. This latter group, which easily could include non Jews passing through the region, is an obvious reference to... gentiles.

Thus, what originally was to be the reward of just the Chosen few, the original invitees, the Jews, became instead the reward of those **not** originally chosen, non- Jews and sinners. Their reward was a banquet, and as we know, banquets typically are joyous, fun occasions full of high spirits.

Yet, the first man said he needed to be excused since he had to see a piece of land he just had purchased. Now, obviously endeavors such as farming and making money are important in life, yet here his concern blinded him to a bigger, more important duty that he owed.

In Matthew's account of this parable, the “certain man” who gave this great supper that Luke recounts, was actually the **king** ...and the great supper was a wedding feast for his son. Obviously were a king in those days to invite someone to an event, attendance would have been mandatory and no *RSVP* would even be sent. (No doubt this has changed some and invitees to King Charles recent Coronation **would** have sent an *RSVP,* in part due to sitting limitations at Westminster Abbey.)

While America does not have a king and nations which still do have reduced greatly the power theirs hold today, monarchs historically have had great power over their people like dictators today do. Their subjects owed them the duty of loyalty and obedience, or at least not **disobedience**, much less dishonor. All subjects who valued their lives, liberty, and the pursuit of personal and family happiness took honoring their king extremely seriously.

Not too long ago this so-called *sense of honor* was much stronger in our own nation. Sports stars served as role models; parents routinely **believed** the school principal, returning soldiers received heroes welcomes, and Roman Catholic priests were “bigger than life”.

Today, leaving aside rabid sports fans who are compelled to insist that their team and players are always the very best, the portion of our society today holding the strongest sense of honor is among our military. That institution still instills respect and honor towards both America and authority. (Likewise they also instill a sense of humility which seems to have been largely erased from the sporting world in the last 50 years.)

Also blinded to a higher calling, a higher duty, was the second man who said he needed to “test drive” his new oxen. Possessions, be they oxen, furniture, clothing, food, or vacations, certainly can enhance the enjoyment of life. But they also, along with hobbies and sports, can easily blind us to other duties and activities which also deserve attention and which might be also of far greater importance.

Likewise the man who bowed out to spend more time with his new bride was blinded, perhaps in part by her inner and outer beauty, to other areas of life which had a right to his time. Certainly a happy marriage is at the root of a happy family and gives rise to happy children and a happy home. Yet, as with one invited into the king's presence or to the White House, there are times when, well, duty calls.

In our own lives we have made promises to God, including promises of veneration. Some of these were made on our behalf at baptism by our parents, but others we expressly chose to make at our Confirmations: such as to try our best to be a good soldier of Christ, someone doing the work of an apostle, like St. Peter, to spread the Good News.

We need then to try our best to keep our promise... to keep Jesus' commandments. That is our duty which we owe to the only king we Americans have, or indeed that the whole world ever really has had. When we fail in it, as we all do, we need to “fess-up” and ask forgiveness and for help, and **not** make excuses.

After all, as a great theologian put it, “the Lord knows the excuses we **deserve** to make better than we do”. If we make excuses, we later may find ourselves kept out on the great, joyous, heavenly banquet which Jesus has planned for us once our tour of duty here on earth is ended. Amen. +