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**ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

*“Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless.”*

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This Gospel story tells of a king planning a wedding for his son, and how he reacts to the invitees' responses to his invitation. While most of us today do not live by sowing seed or fishing as appear in other parables, we all can relate to this story about a great wedding.

Now **planning** a wedding has not changed too greatly since ancient Palestine. Just as then, today one typically invites those dearest to the family, and especially to the engaged couple, to this religious event, along with people we might want to impress such as our boss. Invitations usually go out many, many months in advance, along with *RSVPs*. One big difference from ancient times was that back then the actual starting time on the wedding day was left to be announced until just before the actual date. (Caterers did not exist yet.)

What can we learn from the reactions in this story? The first came from the original invitees, THE CHOSEN. Their reactions ranged from rejection to outright meanness. They could not be bothered; they did not care. They abused the messenger of glad tidings, and even killed them! This king reacted as kings tend to when angered—he then destroyed them. He GRANDLY wiped them off the invite list.

The king then invited others **not** on the “A” list. His messengers were to search high and low for people of good OR bad character. The king wanted a full house. He did not care about their "worthiness".

The people in this second group quite likely felt unworthy of the invitation and surprised to have the chance to enjoy the king's generosity. Their reaction was what the king wanted: they came, good and bad alike, they came.

So far this story bears many obvious parallels to Christ's life. God chose one group of people to experience the joy of His presence. They rejected the offer and even slayed His best messenger, Jesus. Then God chose others to take their place, or as St. Paul put it himself: he turned to the gentiles. This second group appreciated their good fortune and came in droves into the Church.

But there is one other character here, one who actually did COME to the wedding. This is the man without a festive raiment. He irked the king also so that he was tossed out. Initially, the king's reaction might seem “over the top” since the man HAD actually come. But we must remember our own behavior when invited to a party. We do not come over in street clothes, but first clean up and dress up, especially for a wedding. We do this to show respect for the host.

In Jesus' Palestine a wedding host typically would supply a clean festive garment for attendees. Thus, while this man had accepted the invitation of the host, the king, the guest had not even bothered to change into what was available just at the door. He had made at most a minimal effort. We do not know whether he was of good or bad character even, just that he appeared indifferent to his host's gracious invitation.

The man had an opportunity to explain himself or at least say that he was sorry. Instead, he was speechless. We do not know what might have happened if he had merely said he was sorry or that he was drunk. Similarly we do not know how God might have reacted if Adam merely had said that he was sorry.

The king treated the man's indifference as he had those who outrightly rejected his invitation. He cast him out also. The man had had an unexpected opportunity to enjoy his king's favor and did not seem to care. Imagine our own insult if we invited someone to a wedding or banquet and even supplied a free gown or tuxedo, and then a guest at the service still dressed as one who had just come in from weeding the garden!

What can we learn from this case of the Indifferent Invitee? Among the lessons has to be that God regards indifference to His invitations as equal to outright rejection. Not caring is as bad as sticking out one's tongue at God.

Certainly today there is great outright rejection by many to Christ's message. Believing children today bear witness to this daily. Christian and Jewish students at all levels of schooling tell of not just questions and skepticism but often outright hostility and mockery towards them. It always is Open Season on traditional values people (“*Trads*” is a term I’ve heard of recent), especially Christians since we are supposed to turn the other cheek. What we actually have is what schools, otherwise, call "bullying".

Besides atheism though, modern society also has strong agnosticism. This **indifference** is also tragically prevalent in America today. In our society where hurt feelings cause legal investigations, agnosticism functions as the PC version of atheism: "I am not saying your God does not exist, but I am not saying that he does." This indifference passes for sophistication in a society where science routinely seems to prove nothing to be eternal.

Yet invitations to experience the joy of the Gospel abound today, and come even nicely wrapped. Most towns have many churches which are attractive. We have not worshipped in dark and dank catacombs for over seventeen hundred years. Our churches have pretty structures, yards, windows, vestments, and offer inoffensive to inspiring music, free coffee & dough nuts, along with “lifestyle” advice.

Christ's message also comes across the radio, television, Internet, and in copious books. Politicians even still dare to mention God frequently. And here in the Midwest we even have our glorious natural scenery which invites us to contemplate its Creator. Despite all this, many people **still** can not be bothered, and roll over on Sunday morning for a little extra sleep or go for a hefty brunch.

Yet, even among the faithful there is a tendency to indifference. How often we settle for **second** best! We say, “Oh, I would love to help out, but...” or "I had a rough week and need some more rest". We need to remember that as one draws near to death he recalls how he spent his life. Thoughts then are rarely recollections of how one “closed that deal” or “aced” that test or **got** that house. Instead, they are about loved ones and God. How did we interact? Are we happy we did what we did? What do we regret that we did or did not do?

Why would God regard indifference as the same as rejection? Indifference is not caring. Not caring is a silent killer. We saw this in the story of Lazarus and the rich man.

We need only think of stories we have heard about parents who seemingly did not care what their child was doing at night or on weekends, or know about their falling grades. Sometimes there have been catastrophic results which ultimately followed, such as school shootings.

Perhaps this indifferent invitee was trying to be “PC”, be nice—to come but not **really** come. Yet, if he, like even the BAD people in the story, had invested even a minimal effort of his own, he would have experienced great food and drink, great joy—and not wailing and gnashing. Jesus warns us here to take His invitations seriously, to try them out. Invest some time and energy. The “happy” side is that his invitations to experience His peace and joy go not just out to the saints. Amen. +