

## Are you ready to accept the invitation?

Sometimes you want to say “yes” and sometimes you don’t. It’s difficult isn’t it? It may be that you don’t know the person very well or that the venue is a long way off or that you just don’t fancy the bother of having to get ready and prepare etc, etc. Of course sometimes you are just so delighted and surprised to receive the invite - fancy them thinking to invite me, how kind, what a surprise - that you have no hesitation in accepting. So our emotions can go both ways, up or down depending on who is doing the inviting. How to feel then when God is doing the inviting, and you are called upon to allow him into your life? Looking at today’s gospel, all those thoughts and feelings described above are brought into play: disinterest and indifference, being busy with something else, frustration and anger over the issue. What’s going on?

Needless to say there are many things that can and do happen to us in the course of our lives that knock us back, and such events can bring on feelings of resentment or bitterness, especially if we feel that we’ve been hard done by and have not really been deserving of what has happened. We can be scarred by them to the extent that they form barriers in our relationships with our loved ones and our friends as well as with our faith. For many baptised people, childhood memories of a loving and merciful God have long since been forgotten or abandoned, killed off through the cruel realities of the harsh world in which we all live. God has not made their lives happy or comfortable, and many a raw deal suffered at the hands of the unscrupulous have put a tin lid on it. To tell them that God has not forgotten them cuts no ice, but this is the point. The God from whom they have turned away is the God who has sent his Son to be with them. Catholics who have for whatever reason drifted away, are still baptised Catholics. They have been given the invite, yet by forsaking it or by neglecting it or even by sensing that events in their lives have conspired against it, they have become to all intents and purposes metaphorically cut off from God. They don’t feel able to accept the invitation any longer and these feelings remain fastened in their hearts. A distance grows between them and God. He no longer exists for them and therefore they are ready to say that they no longer exist for him. The beautiful thing is that the invitation is still there, it is never withdrawn.

The Synod which is gathered in Rome is delving deeply into just these issues, of how as a Church we can, with love and sensitivity, penetrate and walk alongside those who have become disconnected. Of how, through understanding and compassion we can renew our acquaintance with those who feel, because of their situations, that the Church no longer has any relevance for them. The emphasis on God’s mercy, as a presence that cherishes the good that people do whilst at the same time salves the sting that causes discomfort should be paramount.

You may feel that the parable has a rather upsetting ending, and it is fair enough to interpret the response to the guest who is not wearing a wedding garment as quite shocking, after all he has accepted the invitation. Where is the mercy? Well God’s mercy will not exorcise God’s judgement, accepting the invitation is not a passive deed. *How happy are the merciful – they will have mercy shown them.*

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