

God's Ongoing Invitation to Faith and Communion

By Fr. Jerry Stookey

Well, I certainly happened to be invited, by Jack. And so how did you all respond to your invitation and did Johnny or Diane call you, I guess? No. We're all invited every Sunday and every day of our lives and well ever since we made that commitment baptismal promise. We're getting invitations all the time, right? Respond again to God's call.

Last night after the 5:00 mass I went home around 6:15 and I saw the most beautiful sunset. I don't know did anybody see that? It was incredible. I'm a little color blind but I could see colors this time. It was gorgeous and I thought it's kind of like the invitation I was talking about here. Sometimes you notice and sometimes you don't. Sometimes you ignore them. You're too busy driving and you shouldn't be looking anyway. Or there are just many things in our lives to distract us from the real call, the daily call. In many, many ways this invitation to be good attendees at the banquet.

Now this is a very strange parable. Jesus, you know the guy from Nazareth tells great stories but this is really over the top. Scary. I mean what kind of a king is this? But he's basically trying to summarize all past preparation for his son Jesus. God is the king father and his son Jesus. And all those years and years of salvation history killing the prophets. That's what happens in the sermons, right? They won't come into the light. They won't come into the banquet. Now that's pretty strange. I mean when you think about it if you got an invitation to a king's banquet or a pope's dinner or something.

I was fortunate a couple of years ago I got to do a wedding in Italy, a beautiful Italian wedding. I mean like talk about over the top. If you've ever been to such an event such a wedding. All day in this beautiful villa. They take us out on a boat you know a small group of invited guests with food and drink all day long. It's like I must have gone to heaven, you know. It's just incredible.

[But that kind of experience that all of us have all the time whether you get to a wedding or not we're reminded frequently of the great invitation that we have. To be part of this, to be invited into the light and not stay in the darkness. Who wouldn't want to do that, you know? We're invited and we're here and not just on Sunday but every day. I'm thinking that you know some of my friends say St. Louis is a real food in the city. It's almost like New Orleans, you know. But they have all these restaurants in New Orleans. Everybody goes out. But you don't always eat out. Today there's the best Missouri market over the Botanical Gardens and there's another veggie fest at Forest Park and there's my favorite in August. It's the Festival of Nations. You know? Did you ever go to that International Institute's Festival? I Even if I don't buy any international

food you feel like everyone is welcome. It's a real mixture of everybody, you know, because when it's so isolated at least a lot of our neighbors are. I feel like I don't get to meet a lot of other cultures and people because we're so segregated that if you go to something like that you say, "Wow, what a beautiful family of God!"

All are welcome at the Festival of Nations as they are here at St. Cronan's and in every church and all of the time. If we could just experience and invite one another in an equal way and include one another. Now the great thing about St. Cronan is that you're concerned already about maybe the people who don't have food. They don't want to go to the banquet. They don't you know but there's no food stamps anymore or USAID's cut off. We have food pantries in St. Louis. Our parishes work together. We have soup kitchens. We're doing what we can trying to not just feed the hungry but even the spiritual and emotional needs of so many people. This is domestic violence month. There are so many people who need protection and need help and it's not always canned goods and food. It's a lot of concern for those who can't even come to the banquet.

Now the story is really strange because you know what happens, of course, is that you can feel you get burned. It's almost prophetic. Jesus is coming. We've seen Babylon destroyed, exiles. We'll see Jerusalem destroyed. So the burning of the city sounds punitive on the king's part. But the whole story is one of saying come to the banquet and put on the right garment. Once we've been putting on the baptismal garment, once you're suited up, you know you don't throw it off, you don't dismiss it, you don't whatever. You get thrown out if that happens, you know, in the wedding story the guy could have easily got his garment on the way in. It's to remind us that those who come once you say you're coming to it.

Do the right thing. Be the disciple that might even invite others into the banquet because it's not just getting in but sharing the invitation ourselves. We're all missionaries, you know. We're all supposed to be by our lives at least if not by word telling others, showing others about this banquet, this wonderful life. And that's not always easy. I know St. Paul reminds us. He says, "I've been through it all. I've seen hunger and abundance. I've seen everything by the grace of God."

We do this. We can be those people who stay strong even when it's difficult. So I'm glad I was invited and I hope you feel invited and not by mail or phone call but all of the time. There are many, many calls during the day during the week, 24/7. It's not over after mass today. It's all the time. God's out there like a sunset. If we could just see it and remember to look, to be attentive to God's calling to be members of this wonderful banquet. I kind of hope in heaven it's a big party and big, big banquet. I'm a foodie, you know. And Jesus is always telling stories and going to feasts. From the beginning. he

goes to The Wedding feast till the end of the last supper giving his own life as food for us. A lot of banquets, Pharisees, all these dinners and that's what we're probably all doing in some ways, feeding our community of friends, people.

I can't imagine any of you going to see friends and family and never sharing a cup of coffee or meal with them. This is part of our lives, to feed one another especially spiritually. Because the food may come and go but will we be really ready for the banquet together the final day? So keep your commitment and your invitation, answer the invitation and try to get others to come next time.

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