

Reflection for Pentecost 20 by Rev'd Peter Shaw

In our gospel reading today, we heard the parable about those invited to a banquet - and their excuses for declining the invitation.

It illustrates God's gracious invitation to us all - to attend His feast for all eternity, a feast through being with God, in His love.

In this parable Jesus uses the excuses people give for not going to a feast - to illustrate the reasons why people do not accept God's invitation. It also illustrates how shallow these excuses are in the light of the enormity and wonderful significance of God's gracious invitation.

In other words, are we really going to accept God's invitation – or are we too busy with our material and earthly lives.

We hear that the various guests - Luke mentions three in all - began to excuse themselves.

The first man bought a piece of ground and needed to go and see it. This excuse was very obviously false - no one would buy a field without careful prior inspection and if by some chance a man had done this, there would be no hurry - the field would still be there tomorrow. It seems quite obvious that the man did not want to come or could not be bothered.

The second man had bought five yolk or five pairs of oxen, and said that he had to go and prove them. Again this excuse is rather transparent; who of us today would buy a car without test driving it first, and fully satisfying ourselves that the car would be up to our expectations.

The third man's excuse is certainly original and very interesting. This excuse of being newly married at first sight is backed up with a passage of Holy Scripture - for Deuteronomy Chapter 24:5 states that a man should be at home during the first year of married life.

But closer inspection of this passage indicates that this was a regulation aimed at freeing a man from military service or related duties, and not isolating him from social contacts.

On top of all this, some of these so called guests seized the King's slaves, maltreated them, and killed them.

The master was clearly exasperated, but he was clearly determined to hold his banquet as arranged and not allow his plans to be disrupted. So he sent his slaves out to bring in all the disadvantaged and the poor to the banquet.

The fact that the King's slaves were asked to carry out this task indicates that these people were not forced to come - it was up to them.

The king goes in to look at the guests and sees a man not wearing wedding clothes. Perhaps he arrived in his working clothes, without taking the trouble to prepare himself for the feast. Augustine has suggested, however, that the king provided wedding garments for all his guests. This man has either neglected or refused to wear the provided garment. Either way, he has seriously insulted the king and is summarily thrust outside. Jesus speaks here, as he does elsewhere, of the pain and suffering of those excluded from the feast. Jesus then sums up the teaching of this parable with the words, "Many are called, but few are chosen."

The parallels with God's mission on earth are quite obvious.

God's invitation had initially gone out to his chosen people through the prophets. However, the prophets were invariably treated and killed. Now through Jesus, the second invitation was given. When through their religious elite, the chosen people refused the first invitation, the church was to bring in both those within the city (the Jews) and those outside (gentiles)

Jesus parable concludes with a sombre verdict on those who were first invited but made excuses - there would be no second chance for them - they had squandered their opportunity and would get no other.

The parallels with our own everyday lives are quite obvious; we are called to God's feast through his agents, the church, Holy Scripture and the Holy Spirit.

So let us pray for the grace and faith to understand what God is asking of us, and to accept His invitation, with joy and grace, to spend eternity in His loving presence and not be distracted by the temporal things of this life.

Are we going to accept God's gracious and loving invitation? We must remember: **"many are called but few are chosen"**.

Amen