

The Twentieth Sunday after Trinity, A ✕ D 2009

Matthew 22:1-14 And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, ² "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son, ³ and sent his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding feast, but they would not come. ⁴ Again he sent other servants, saying, 'Tell those who are invited, See, I have prepared my dinner, my oxen and my fat calves have been slaughtered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding feast.' ⁵ But they paid no attention and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, ⁶ while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them. ⁷ The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. ⁸ Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding feast is ready, but those invited were not worthy. ⁹ Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.' ¹⁰ And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests. ¹¹ "But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. ¹² And he said to him, 'Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?' And he was speechless. ¹³ Then the king said to the attendants, 'Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' ¹⁴ For many are called, but few are chosen."

In the name of the Father and of the ✕ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1 Clothes make the man, and you are what you wear. There's no mistaking the fact that God wants everyone to be saved and that the call to His banquet is for everyone. He sends servants to invite anyone and everyone until the banquet hall is filled. God is no respecter of persons. He invites everyone: rich and poor, good and bad, brilliant and dull. And the banquet hall will be filled. All of God's elect will be there. Many are called; in fact, all are called. But few are chosen. God makes very clear the means through which He does His election, His choosing: Word and Sacrament. You may not spend a lifetime rejecting the means through which God does His electing and yet suppose yourself to be among the elect. To reject God's gifts is to reject His call. But if you are where God does His electing, where the Word is preached, where the Sacraments are delivered, you may have confidence that you are among the elect because the election is done by God. All of your salvation is wrought by Him. The banquet will be filled, but you may not come wearing whatever you wish.

2 The clothes make the man, and you are what you wear. The assumption that what you wear doesn't matter as long as you're wearing something is as old as it is false. After they rebelled against God, Adam and Eve's eyes suddenly turned toward themselves. And they saw that they were naked. They had been naked all along, but they hadn't cared until they sinned. Suddenly, sinners care about themselves. The nature of sin is to be curved in on yourself. So seeing themselves and being ashamed, Adam and Eve sought to make clothes for themselves. What they wore didn't matter they supposed, as long as they wore something. So fig leaves sewn into garments were their clothing of choice. But they weren't good enough. Leaves cannot cover sin and shame. So God made different clothes for them, clothes more to His liking, from the skin of an animal. And animals don't give up their skins without also shedding their blood and losing their lives. The message is clear: sin means death. To cover sin, something has to die.

3 Clothes make the man, and you may not wear whatever you wish. The biggest fashion faux pas is to arrive at the King's banquet underdressed. That's not a comment about what you wear to the Divine Service, although, what you wear here is a confession about what you believe happens here. If you believe the Lord of the Universe comes to you in this

service, particularly in the forms of bread and wine, to give you Himself, you'll dress accordingly. The same goes for clergy, too. They may not wear whatever they wish, but the Church has appointed a uniform, vestments, to cover the man and display the beauty of the Office of Christ. Beneath the vestments, the men are interchangeable. But even from the hand of a man wearing khakis and a polo Jesus can distribute His true Body and Blood. And your clothes, no matter how nice or how shabby, how appropriate or how scandalous, cannot make you worthy or unworthy to be welcomed at the King's banquet. Only the wedding garment does that.

4 So where do you receive this required garment? Here at the font. "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." (Ga. 3:26) Clothes make the man. The only way to be welcomed in the wedding banquet is to be wearing Jesus, His holiness, covering your sin and yourself. Clothes make the man; they make you like Christ. Wearing the garment of His perfect righteousness is the only way you'll be allowed into the banquet. The good news is that the garment accompanies the invitation, delivered freely in the waters of Holy Baptism. The warning, Jesus says, is that you lose the wedding garment.

5 How can that happen? How might you, like the man cast out of the banquet into the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth, cast into hell, lose the garment of Christ's perfect righteousness, delivered to you in Holy Baptism? Two ways. You may reject the garment of Christ's righteousness by choosing to clothe yourself instead with your own righteousness. If your hope for salvation rests on your belief that you're basically a good person, if your confidence in eternal life rests in your ability to compose a list of all the good things you've done, you'll be sorely disappointed to hear the Lord's fashion critique, His evaluation of that garment. You're grossly out of style. The prophet Isaiah knew well, "We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are filthy rags." (Is. 64:6) No, those clothes won't work. Your own righteousness is worse than fig leaves; it's filthy rags. The other way you may lose the garment of Christ's perfect righteousness is to try to reclothe yourself in sin. If you think you can wear the righteousness of Jesus while sleeping next to the one to whom you're not married, while surfing the Internet for pornography, while blowing your paycheck at the slot machines, while keeping your children from Sunday school and catechesis, while planning to sin, you are sorely mistaken. "How can we who died to sin still live in it?" (Rom 6:2) Repent. Your own righteousness and your intentional sin are equally filthy.

6 The proof that God does not love you just the way you are is in the Incarnation. God became Man. The Word of God, the Second Person of the Trinity, clothed Himself in human flesh. Clothes make the man, make God and man one in the person of Jesus. He didn't turn a blind eye to humanity's sinfulness; He took human flesh, was tempted in every way, yet was completely without sin. "We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin." He took human flesh to be clothed with humanity's sinfulness. When Jesus came to John the Baptist to be baptized by him, John declared, "behold the Lamb of

God, who takes away the sin of the world.” So He did. In His Baptism, Jesus took away your sin, made it His own. He was clothed with your sin. When stripped naked and hung shamefully on the cross to die, Jesus was clothed with your sin, was taking away your sin, all of it. To cover sin, something has to die. The innocent animal in Eden who shed his blood to give his skin points to the Lamb of God, whose blood covers sin.

7 Clothes make the man. Jesus has taken away your sin and given you His righteousness. The water of Baptism is your reality every day. You wear Jesus. “The old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires so that a new man might daily emerge to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.” Clothed in the righteousness of Jesus, when God looks at you, he doesn’t see your sin. You’re wearing Christ. Clothes make the man.

8 In that daily contrition and repentance, that daily struggle against your sinful flesh that wants you to doff the robe of Christ’s righteousness, you are sustained. When you question whether you truly possess that righteousness, God reassures you through the mouth of His ministers. Their “I forgive you” is the proof that you still retain the required wedding garment. And as you are clothed in Jesus’ righteousness, He welcomes you at His banquet. Here, at His altar, is a foretaste of the Feast at His Return. Here, your Lord clothes Himself in bread and wine, and feeds you with Himself. Under mere bread is the true Body of Jesus; under ordinary wine is the Blood He shed for you. Washed in that crimson flood, your clothes are pure white. You wear the righteousness of Jesus. You are what you wear. Clothes make the man.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria
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