

**Homily for the Third Annual Third Circuit Red Mass  
The Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle A**

**October 15, 2017**

**Saint Boniface Church  
Edwardsville, Illinois**

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

Reverend Father(s), Deacons, consecrated religious, members of the judiciary, fellow attorneys and practitioners of the legal profession, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ: it is good to be here as we gather to celebrate the Third Annual Third Circuit Red Mass for the St. Thomas More Lawyers Guild of the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois on this twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time. The name “Red Mass” comes from the red vestments that are worn as the color symbolizing the Holy Spirit, whose wisdom and guidance we implore to guide the work and decisions of our legal professionals and civic officials in the legislative, executive and judicial branches of government.

Reflecting on today’s Gospel passage, it is hard to imagine that anyone receiving an invitation to a royal wedding would refuse to go. When Prince William married Catherine Middleton in 2011, guests

naturally included their own families, members of other royal families, religious and political leaders; but, breaking with precedent, half the guests were friends from their childhood and university days, as well as representatives of charities they supported, celebrities and some people who would never have expected an invitation. As everyone present at dinner was deemed “equally important” to the couple, the tables were a mix of royals, family members and friends.

Only fifteen of the two thousand invitees declined, most of them through ill health. The Crown Prince and Princess of Japan could not come because their country had been hit by an earthquake and a tsunami, and the Prince of Liechtenstein was attending the beatification of John Paul II, which clashed with the wedding.

In today’s Gospel Jesus presents a strange story about a royal wedding. Servants delivered personal invitations to the wedding of a king’s son, but no one turned up. When the banquet was ready the king sent more servants to tell them to come. But they made limp excuses, beat up the servants and killed them. Then the story becomes really bizarre. The furious king dispatched troops to burn down the town where these murderers lived. After that, by which time the food on the table must have

been stone cold, he sent another lot of servants out into the streets to fetch in anyone at all, good and bad alike, until the hall was filled with guests.

The theme is the familiar one of the failure of God's chosen people to respond to what God expected of them, and their replacement by others who did. It is a peculiar story, but those who first heard it would know some things we may not. They would know that the first servants sent out were the prophets Moses, Elijah, Elisha and others, whose message was ignored. The second group of servants were more prophets, like Isaiah, who, in the first reading, talked about God preparing a banquet of rich food and fine wines for all people. The prophets made heartfelt appeals for men and women to repent and accept God's invitation to enter the kingdom of God, but they were scorned, ill-treated and some of them were killed. The sending of the troops to burn up the city while the food was on the table refers to the tragedy of 70 A.D.: the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans and the massacre of its inhabitants, which Jesus warned would happen because of their rejection of God's kingdom. The first readers of St Matthew's Gospel would have had vivid memories of it.

After that, the servants went out along the roads and invited anyone they could find, good and bad alike; people who would never have

expected an invitation. These Gentiles responded to their invitation with joy, and the wedding hall was filled with guests.

These last servants who travelled the roads to bring in guests were the apostles and missionaries of the Church. The king told his servants to “go,” the same word used later in Matthew’s Gospel when Jesus tells the apostles to “go” and make disciples of all nations. They travelled beyond Jerusalem into Gentile lands, to Europe, Asia, Africa and eventually America and Australia. They are still going out, these missionaries, priests, sisters and laypeople, suffering hardships as Saint Paul, in the second reading, told us he did, inviting men and women into the kingdom of God. All of us in different ways are part of that mission of spreading the Gospel.

The beauty of this parable is that it presents the kingdom of God as a wedding banquet, highly desirable and attractive. Moreover, the Lord freely invites us to be his guests. We do not have to be worthy; we could never be worthy of God’s invitation. But if we are to be true disciples of our Lord, we must open our hearts to accept the salvation that our Lord, in His great love, offers to each and every one of us.

Toward the end of the parable, Jesus recounts what happened to the person who was invited to the wedding feast, but came without first preparing himself and wearing a garment that was fitting for the occasion. When the king notices this he comes to the guest and asks him why he came without a wedding garment. The guest responds with silence. At this the king ordered his servants to bind the guest and cast him out into the darkness where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.

This is quite a sobering end to a parable about a king who invites people to share the joy of a wedding feast. But lest we get caught up in the idea that it was about the clothes the person was wearing, we must look at this through the viewpoint of our relationship with God. If we look at the wedding feast as heaven and the king as our Lord, what is it that we can take away from this section of the parable?

The parable deals with the spiritual disposition with which we come to the banquet of the Lord. It deals with how we have prepared the “garments” that fit our heart, our mind and our soul: the garment of spiritual longing, the garment of true repentance, the garment of faith, and the garment of reverence. These are the garments that our Lord calls us to focus on as we prepare ourselves to come to this spiritual banquet to which

our Lord invites us. At baptism a white garment is put on. We are clothed in Christ. It is a salutary reminder that we are called to grow into the likeness of Christ we have put on, and live the Gospel life.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ: may we always prepare ourselves spiritually for our participation in the holy sacrifice of the Mass. But let us not isolate that preparation simply to the moments immediately prior to Mass; rather, let us live as Christ calls us to live each and every day of our lives so that at any point we are ready to join in the joy of the Heavenly Feast, rather than being cast out into the darkness, having forfeited the precious gifts that we had been offered, but had not accepted. The reality of this parable is that it was not the punishment of being bound and cast out that caused the wedding guest to wail and grind his teeth; it was his realization that he had lost the ability to share in the Joy of the wedding feast.

As we participate in this Eucharistic banquet, we recognize as people of faith that the consecrated bread and wine are truly the Body and Blood of Jesus. May we be always ready to accept the invitation of our Lord to follow Him as His disciples in this life and so share His joy for all eternity.

May God give us this grace. Amen.