

TWENTY EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

“Go out therefore into the main roads and invite to the feast whomever you may find” Matthew 22:9 is one of the Gospel passages in which the Lord Jesus explicitly commands evangelization. We must invite people to the Heavenly Wedding Feast of the Lamb, prefigured in the Holy Church’s Eucharistic Feast on earth.

In recent years some people in the Church, including Church leaders, even some quite prominent Church leaders, have become strangely reluctant to make that invitation. We are occasionally told that we should not “proselytize”, as though that were somehow a bad thing or a dirty word. According to my old, reliable Webster’s dictionary, “proselytize” just means “to convert or attempt to convert,” and I can’t see how that could possibly be a bad thing, if we are attempting to convert people to Jesus Christ and invite them to His Eternal Wedding Banquet. The fancy word “proselytize” comes from a Biblical Greek word that meant “newcomer.” Today’s Gospel indicates that the Lord Jesus likes having newcomers at His Feast.

I am sure that the Lord Jesus wants our work of inviting people to Him and to His Feast to be done well, but I am equally sure that He wants it to be done. It should be done respectfully, but there are those who seem to consider the very act of making the invitation somehow disrespectful. I suppose that the invited guests in today’s Gospel parable found it so. How dare you interrupt my busy day with your invitation! Yet it is a good interruption, and one for which one can be eternally grateful. One ought not be unduly intrusive; yet what good is an invitation that is never noticed? Merely to get someone’s attention is in some sense an intrusion; but when the invitation is urgent, getting someone’s attention is quite necessary, and the invitation to Eternal Life is urgent.

Among the half mad mandarins of the European Union, there is a movement afoot to force the Church to erase the baptismal records of people who reject the Faith when they grow up. I cannot refrain from noting the sheer silliness of any effort to erase simple historical facts. Beyond the sheer silliness of it, however, there lurks a dark resentment that the invitation to Lamb’s joyful Wedding Feast had ever been made, as though even an invitation in infancy was somehow an intrusion into a life of modern busyness. On the contrary, what could be sweeter than having as part of one’s earliest memories an invitation to eternal happiness? The fact that someone later decides to reject the invitation does not cancel the fact that the invitation was made. The rejection and its consequences are the responsibility of the one choosing to despise the Savior. Making the invitation is the responsibility of the Church, including parents and godparents. Their invitation is not cancelled by a later rejection. Indeed, by God’s Grace there remains, up until the very end of this life, hope that the invitation may finally be accepted.

One accepts the invitation to the heavenly Church’s Wedding Feast, and its prefigurement in the earthly Church’s Eucharistic Feast, more than once. One accepts the invitation whenever he or she comes forward for Holy Communion. One also accepts the invitation when one comes forward for Confirmation.

The Eastern Catholic Churches have their own quite legitimate tradition of giving what they call “Chrismation” immediately after Baptism, even for infants. Honestly, I much prefer the Roman Catholic tradition of delaying Confirmation until after infancy. In our tradition, Confirmation is one of the earliest opportunities of giving a personal, conscious “yes” to the Lord’s invitation to eternal life. In my lifetime, there has been continual debate and discussion

about the proper age for Confirmation. I was confirmed late in 8th grade (and am still very slightly traumatized by the vaguely “rock n’roll” song they made the newly confirmed sing at the congregation, to the text “Go Ye Into All the World and Preach the Gospel” - good text, but bad tune) Later on, Confirmation came to be celebrated for juniors in high school, and then it moved back to 7th or early 8th grades. I don’t have any illusion of ending the debate about Confirmation here and now; but, for what it’s worth, I tend to like Confirmation in early or mid teen years, when people are certainly no longer children, but also certainly not yet adults. At this age, they are getting ready to go out into the world, but they haven’t had the time to sink deeply into bad habits. Their Baptismal Robe is still mostly clean. As they enter adulthood, they are going to have to start fighting seriously against the world, the flesh, and the devil. The best time to confirm them, I think, is just when they reach the halfway mark between childhood and adulthood. Their hearts are still basically tender, and tender hearts are more likely to say yes to the Lord’s invitation, and to cooperate with the Grace that He pours upon those who accept the invitation.

Yes, I do like Confirmation in early or mid teen years, and parents and godparents should not be embarrassed about bringing their children forward for Confirmation. I fear that if we wait for later teen years or even full adulthood, too many people will have received a kind of negative “confirmation”, meaning an initiation into bad habits (which, in this day and age, especially means pornography). That would mean that instead of Christ’s bishop laying hands on them, the devil laid hands on them. Better late than never, when it comes to Confirmation; but I think it is better to be a bit on the early side, ideally early to mid teen years

Well, the Church in different places will continue to celebrate the Sacrament of Confirmation at various times. Further, life circumstances may lead people to come to the Sacrament later in life, by God’s mercy. In any case, coming forward for Confirmation is a way of accepting the Lord Jesus’ invitation to His Heavenly Wedding Feast, and to its foretaste in the Eucharistic Feast. That eternal happiness is our destiny, in Jesus Christ, if we cooperate with Him through Faith and Faith’s Good Works. May God bring all of us, young and old, through our Savior Jesus Christ, into the unending bliss He has prepared for us.

Amen.