

Take a moment to picture the last three major family celebrations in your life. Maybe you see that favorite uncle who always tells the best stories. Maybe it's a birthday party with you and some of your extended family. Or maybe you see the dance floor at the last wedding reception you attended. Regardless of the occasion, there is likely one unifying thread in all three of those celebrations: food. When I was ordained, my aunt and uncle made a special vintage of wine for my ordination reception. Married couples go out on taste tests for cake and for reception food. When birthdays roll around, chances are there will be cake. Thanksgiving? Turkey time! New Years? Champagne! Buckeye game? Food trucks!

We all have a deeply embedded instinct to celebrate by sharing a meal. Food has the awesome ability to bring people together. All around the world, family ties are woven and strengthened at the banquet table. It is no different when it comes to the working of God with His people.

God speaks to us today about the greatest and most universal table of all, the one where God's feast forges us into a worldwide family. The first reading gives that foretaste of what God has planned for his people. Isaiah speaks a prophecy about the rich feast God will provide not just for the Jewish people, but for all people: "a feast of rich food and choice wines, juicy, rich food and pure, choice wines." He then links this wonderful, rich feast to the destruction of death itself, and the wiping away of all tears. This is quite a powerful feast Isaiah foretells!

As Christians, we know what feast Isaiah is pointing towards--the feast of the Eucharist, where the food we eat is the most precious food of all: the very body and blood of God made Man, Jesus our Savior! Each and every time we gather around the table of the altar, we experience once again the power of Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus commands us: "do this in memory of me," and each time that we do, we come into contact with His perfect act of sacrificial love on the Cross. We eat his body, given up for each of our sins. We drink His Blood, poured out to seal the everlasting

family bond between God and us. This meal is where we taste the Bread of Life, God's definitive answer to death!

In the Gospel, Jesus weaves a parable for us with this Eucharistic feast in mind. He tells of a wedding feast thrown by a king for his son. Tragically, many people fail to come to the feast. Some ignore the invitation and go back to their daily lives. Others actually mistreat and kill the messengers of the feast and invite the wrath of the king upon themselves. Still others come to the feast unprepared and are thrown out.

All of these people have a lesson to teach us. They warn us of the different ways in which we might turn away from the great feast that God sets for us. Some of us might simply ignore the invitation of God. We pick and choose when we come to the Wedding Feast of the Lamb because other obligations have taken hold of our weekends. Some of us might think that this is just an empty ritual with no real meaning. How could that bread and wine become Jesus' Body and Blood? By adopting this attitude, we mistreat and disrespect the messengers of God: those given the authority passed on from the Apostles to preach and act with Jesus' authority. Finally, some of us are like that person who comes to the Feast without a wedding garment. We tell ourselves that we don't need to prepare to come to the Eucharist, that we can receive Jesus in the Eucharist even with serious sin on our hearts. We don't bother going to Confession so that the white garment of our baptism can be washed clean for the feast!

So let us take to heart the serious words of Jesus in today's parable. If we are neglecting this awesome feast in any way, there is always the opportunity to turn over a new leaf. Jesus wants to come and meet us personally each time we receive Him in the Eucharist. If there is sin holding us back, I encourage us to seek healing in Confession. If we have let other things come before this awesome feast, let us recommit to making it a priority.

Around this table, God wants to forge the family ties with the Church through the richest feast imaginable. Let us pray for hearts that are open to this feast: *Come Holy Spirit, help us long for the nourishment of Jesus in the Eucharist and do whatever is necessary to prepare well for this Heavenly Food. Amen.*