

28th Sunday - Year A**First Reading:** Isaiah 25.6-10**Responsorial Psalm:** Ps 22 (23)**Second Reading:** Philippians 4:12-14,19-20**Gospel:** Matthew 22:1-14

For many years South Africa was an outcast among the nations of the world because of its policy of separation of the races who lived within its borders. The word to describe this segregation, Apartheid, entered the dictionaries of many different languages throughout the world, not least of that of the country itself which now has eleven official languages. Apartheid is synonymous with all that is involved in discrimination, separation, bias and hatred. It has been the cause of untold suffering for many millions for too many years. It can still be found in many forms in countries throughout the world but for the most part these countries would not like it to be publically known. Probably the most recent case in the news is the plight of the Rohingya people of Myanmar, otherwise known as Burma. In South Africa it was official government policy but this wasn't the first case of this. The Nazis implemented it against the Jews and other races in the Nuremburg Laws of 1935. In the United States racial segregation was a fact of life right up to the sixties as it was actually enshrined in law in many southern states.

The whole purpose of these policies was to keep another people in subjugation and impress upon them the lie that they were inferior and even sub-human. They were designed to maintain the illusion that a section of the population was superior and had the right to rule. In certain cases, it was based on religion or faith. That was partially the case in South Africa, Germany and the US and is now the case in Myanmar. They are not a product of recent history but can be found down through the centuries, slavery being the most obvious example.

Another, maybe less obvious example can be found in the Bible where we read that the Jewish people are God's Chosen People. This did not and does not mean they were superior to other human beings. It means they were to be the means by which God would communicate and carry out his plan of salvation for the world. Much of salvation history is based on God's relation with the Jewish nation and Jesus, the Son of God and Saviour of the world was born a Jew. He even said that salvation would come through the Jews as he told the Samaritan woman in Jn: 4; 22, but when Jesus spoke this parable we hear today to the Jews he was telling them they had not lived up to expectations. They were God's Chosen, but they had not acted out that role well in God's plan. They were supposed to be messengers and examples of how God's love and mercy works in the world, but instead they had become complacent and proud. They were the Chosen People and they were going to let everyone know it. If a Jew entered the home of a non-Jew he was considered to be tainted and had to go through a process of purification before going into the synagogue again. Even during Jesus' trial the Pharisees went to see Pilate but he had to come out of his house to meet them because they refused to enter and become impure.

This was just one rule which governed Jewish life. There were many others all aimed at making sure that God's Chosen would remain untainted and exclusive and apart from the rest of humankind. These rules made up "The Law" and it made the Pharisees and many others lose sight of God's law of love and protection that had been promised to them through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses and the prophets.

Christ's message of a wedding banquet would not have been lost on them and would not have gone down well. They were told that the Gentiles, the very ones they looked down on and even despised, would inherit all the rewards which they thought would be automatically theirs. They were being portrayed as self-important, self-absorbed people symbolising all the senselessness and stupidity of rejecting God's love and failing to communicate it to others.

After the death and Resurrection of Jesus his words became a reality through the efforts of his disciples strengthened and guided by the Holy Spirit. God's Chosen people are still the Jews because he never redraws his blessings but this blessing has been extended to include all those who proclaim themselves to be Christian. However, it must be remembered that the meaning and purpose of being God's Chosen People remain the same. We are to be messengers and examples of how God's love is present in the world. We become the people of God through our Baptism but Baptism alone does not give us an automatic entrance into God's Kingdom. We must live out the promises that were made on our behalf at our Baptism and we renew these at Easter and even at every Mass we attend. We must live for and with Jesus and then, as St Paul says, he will fulfil all our needs.

In the busy world we live in it is all too easy to put our own interests first and God can often take a very poor second place. There can be a temptation to leave God at the door of the church and the temptations don't stop there. There are many distractions and attractions which can create and widen a gulf between God and ourselves. These can range from our laziness which makes us say, "I can't be bothered going to Mass or taking time to pray". This can also lead us to let down someone who is depending on us. We may give in to the temptation that some people are in some way less than us and so are undeserving of our care and consideration. We can practice our own form of Apartheid. Our drives to get what we want can lead us to disregard others and God's law causing pain and suffering. At the same time we will find a way to rationalise and justify our actions. We can never justify putting God's love and law in second place to our own ambitions. If we do, we will be rejecting the invitation to be his people and so, will be rejecting his love.

Each Mass we attend and every time we come before God in prayer is a sharing in the wedding banquet Jesus speaks about in today's Gospel. He tells us we must be wearing the right garment and that garment is our commitment to the Christian life. It is a garment made up of our words and actions through the week and all our lives. There is no point in coming to Mass on a Sunday or praying to God without being committed to what he asks of us in our daily lives. Our starting point in Mass and any prayer must be a commitment to have the courage, faith and strength to put God first so we will deserve to be called his Chosen People and then will be confident, comfortable and secure that we will truly share in the banquet he has promised and prepared for us at the end of our lives.