Homily for the 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time 2026 Year A

‘Many are called but few are chosen’.

That surely is one of the most familiar of Christ’s sayings in the New Testament, but what does it mean?

Well, in the context that Christ is using it, the story of the wedding feast, it seems to refer to Heaven, to Eternal Life, and to Salvation.

And if it does, then that first reading from the prophet Isaiah and the message of Jesus in the Gospel seemed to contradict each other. The prophet Isaiah speaks joyfully of the universal Salvific will of God: ‘On this mountain the Lord of hosts will prepare a banquet for all peoples’; all are invited, and all can attend the feast of Eternal Life.

But the picture Christ presents in the Gospel tells a very different story: only some are invited, and then by default perhaps a few others. And, as if a limited number of invitees was not bad enough, not all of those will be let in.

Christ presents a highly restricted and limited view of the possibility of Salvation in the parable that He uses. If we are to take Christ literally then we are left with this image of a God who arbitrarily opens the possibility of Salvation to some, but not others. There may be many in number, but by implication, there are still some who are not called and then not all of those who have been called will be chosen. Depending upon your temperament, a pleasing prospect for some, and a source of worry and anxiety to others.

But it was thought that God was meant to be a caring Creator who wished to enter into a loving relationship with all of His creatures, and that it was only some, who by their own deliberate choices, excluded themselves from the wedding feast of Eternal Life.

To transpose Christ words, ‘All are called but a few choose not to respond to that call’. That Universal Salvific will of God is the position of the Church, but at the same time we cannot ignore that there are plenty of other texts in the Gospel that warn how difficult it is to get into the Kingdom of Heaven.

What I would like to illustrate simply from today's Gospel is the danger of taking an isolated text from the Gospel and building a fundamental point of theology upon it.

We are all called upon to be theologians, to form ideas and concepts about the mystery that is God and to speak words to each other about our understanding of God.

Now a good theology, literally words about God, is always formed not by extreme notions, but by taking into account the whole picture, the much rounder overall picture that Christ reveals about Himself to us from all four Gospels.

We could indeed use today's text, ‘Many are called but few are chosen’, to paint a picture of an arbitrarily selective picky God, who alone chooses those few who will share Eternal Life with him, but it would not be the whole truth.

Christ used the medium of parables or storytelling, to get profound messages across to what was probably a very simple and predominantly illiterate audience. But in the act of telling stories Christ Himself is limited by the plot and the outline of those stories. In today's Gospel we see him choose the idea of a wedding feast as an image of what Heaven and Eternal Life would be like.

The people listening would have been very familiar with this image of Heaven. It is common in the prophets of the Old Testament, it is there in the first reading from Isaiah, it was a great feast. For the story to have effect, Christ had to be consistent and to be true to the image He had chosen.

If you throw a party or a wedding breakfast you don't invite everybody, but you may invite a lot of people and you are selective, family and friends. If there happens to be a gatecrasher who is conspicuous by their inappropriate dress, you will quietly show them the door.

Jesus wanted to make a point in this story, not a point about the Universal Salvific will of His Father, (or else He wouldn't have used the image of the wedding feast with the numbers are necessarily limited), but He wanted to make a different point, that there are conditions for entry into the wedding feast of Eternal Life. Each person must be appropriately clothed, clothed in the garments of holiness and virtue, a symbol that they themselves have deliberately chosen to live a life whose reward is the wedding feast of Eternal Life.

‘Come to my feast, but come properly prepared and dressed’, are words addressed to all of Gods creatures, but if, by deliberate choice, we choose not to clothe ourselves properly by a life of goodness and holiness, not only will we not be admitted, but it is by our own free choice that we preclude ourselves from admission.

So, take heart and have hope as Christ's parable is more about the appropriate conditions for admission to Eternal Life and the part that our own free choice plays in that, rather than a pessimistic picture of an arbitrary God and the exclusivity of Heaven. All are called, but some freely choose not to meet the conditions for entry.

When we were baptised, after the water had been poured over our heads, we were then wrapped in a white shawl. The priest then addressed us, 'See in the white garment you are wearing the outward sign of your new Christian dignity. With your family and friends to help you by their words and example bring that dignity one day unstained to the Eternal Life of Heaven.'

We were wrapped in the garments of Salvation, and we are qualified for admission to the feast of Eternal Life. It is now up to us to accept that invitation by the holiness of the lives that we lead.