

Perhaps you noticed the quotation from the Letter to the Philippians that I use fairly often in my preaching. It is found in today's second reading. So while you are reflecting with me on today's readings, another mystery for you to ponder is: how is Deacon Charlie going to work that sentence into this homily.

We all know that Jesus reveals his love and mercy in all that he says and does. All of his teaching reveals the saving love of God. This is especially true with the parables we have been listening to over the past few weeks. These stories of the kingdom clearly reveal the outpouring of God's desire to embrace us in and through Jesus Christ. God is love, in the words of John's first letter. His love and mercy are fully revealed to us in Christ. We meet and know Christ in the truth, handed down to us in the Tradition of our Church and in the Holy Scriptures.

The work of the Church in every age is to proclaim this saving truth. However, it is also true that our idea of love must be purified, corrected and raised up by Christ and it is, in his Cross and Resurrection. But our ability to return God's love can be affected by our human nature. Indeed, sometimes we may twist love to our own selfish purposes. But the very foundation of our sharing every weekend and, in fact, whenever we gather to pray and worship, is to grow and strengthen

a personal relationship with Jesus, a relationship that is based on true love.

This relationship is the basis for the evangelizing ministry of the Church. And all priests, deacons and, in fact all baptized Christians who share in the one priesthood of Christ are called to reach out to others. All of us, by our anointing with Sacred Chrism, in the moment after we were baptized with water, are conformed to the priesthood of Christ, who is our priest and prophet and king and the model for our lives of faith.

In the parable of the marriage feast Jesus taught the chief priests and elders of his day that, in Him, God the Father invites them to the banquet of eternal life. They, and all of the Chosen People, are invited guests. But many of them refuse to come to the feast; they reject God's invitation outright. By murdering the prophets and teachers who preceded Christ, many even proved themselves unworthy, unfit for the heavenly banquet.

In Christ, the abundance of the kingdom of grace and peace, the banquet of God's eternal goodness is poured forth for all. "...invite everyone you find to the wedding banquet", says the Host. For God there is no A list or B list of celebrities; all are called to accept adoption as His daughters and sons, and to share the bounty of the wedding celebration.

God is love, yes, and He is full of mercy, but His love is demanding. "...when the King came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing a wedding robe." When this guest is questioned why he came in his casual clothes instead of his Sunday best, the man is speechless.

Jesus desires deeply that all be saved, and so he invites everyone to the banquet, but he preserves every person's freedom to reject him. This is a great mystery, but the answer lies in God's love. True love preserves the freedom of the one who is loved, to either respond with a free, authentic love or to say no. But the question remains: why did the king tell this one man he was improperly dressed? Why did he speak such harsh words? "Bind him hand and foot and throw him into the outer darkness." St. Gregory said it this way... "The marriage is the wedding of Christ and his Church and the garment is the virtue of charity." Clothe yourselves with the new self, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

The sincere response, the 'yes' of an interior life of charity, is reflected in external acts of love towards God and our neighbors.

Daily we are asked to recall Jesus' teaching, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." At times our all too human version of love forgets that authentic love means dying to self and living in obedience to God's will. And, if ever we feel unworthy of God's love –

if we feel like we are wearing blue jeans and a ball cap when we should have put on our tuxedo, we have his gifts of reconciliation and of the Eucharist to inspire us and to heal us and to bring us ever closer to God. And we have those inspiring words from Philippians 4:13 to remind us, “I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”