

Jesus is the Bridegroom of His People

Jesus Christ is the Bridegroom foretold by the prophets and we are all invited to share in His wedding feast, if we have our “wedding garment”

“For he who has become your husband is your Maker; his name is the Lord of Hosts: your redeemer is the Holy One of Israel” (Is 54:5). Once again we quote these words of Isaiah to recall that the prophets of the Old Testament saw God as the Spouse of the chosen people. Israel was depicted as a bride, often and unfaithful one due to her sins, especially her falling into idolatry. The Lord of hosts, however, remained faithful to his chosen people. He continued to be their redeemer, the Holy One of Israel”

On the groundwork laid by the prophets, the New Testament presents Jesus Christ as the Spouse of the new People of God: he is that “redeemer, the Holy One of Israel” who was foretold and announced from afar; in him the prophecies were fulfilled: Christ the Bridegroom.

The first one to present Jesus in his light was John the Baptist in his preaching on the banks of the Jordan: “I am not the Messiah”, he told his listeners, “but I was sent before him. *The one who has the bride is the bridegroom*; the best man, who stand and listens for him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom’s voice” (Jn 3:28-29).

Jesus of Nazareth, therefore, is brought into the midst of his people as the Bridegroom who had been announced by the prophets. He himself confirms this when, in answer to the question raised by John’s disciples, “Why do your disciples not fast?” (Mk 2:18), he said: “Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast. But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast” (Mk2:19-20). With this answer Jesus makes it clear that the prophetic message about God the Spouse, about the “redeemer, the Holy One of Israel”, is fulfilled in himself. He reveals his awareness of being the Bridegroom among his disciples, from whom at the end, however, “the bridegroom will be taken away”. He is aware of both his messiahship and the cross on which he will accomplish his sacrifice in obedience to the Father as foretold by the prophets.
(Is 41:1-9; 49:1-7; 50:4-11; 52:13-53)

“The kingdom of heaven may be likened to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son” (Mt22:2).

Everything in the parable makes it clear that Jesus is speaking of himself, but he does so in the third person, which is a feature of his discourse in the parables. In the context of the parable about the king who invites guests to his son’s wedding feast, Jesus uses the analogy of a wedding banquet to highlight the truth about the kingdom of God, which he himself brings to

the world, and God's invitation to the Bridegroom's feast, i.e., the acceptance of Christ's message in communion with the new people whom the parable presents as being called to a wedding. But he also adds a reference to the refusals made to the invitation, which Jesus observes in the situation of many of listeners.

He also adds that all those invited in his time and all times must have an attitude worthy of the calling received, symbolized by the "wedding garment" which is to be worn by those who intend to participate in the banquet, so much so that whoever does not wear it is sent away by the king, i.e., by God the Father who invites us to his Son's feast in the Church.

It seems that in Israel's world on the occasion of great banquets the clothes to be worn were made available to the guests in the banquet hall. This fact makes the meaning of that detail in Jesus' parable even clearer: the responsibility not only of the person who rejects the invitation, but also those who claim to attend without fulfilling the requisite conditions for being worthy of the banquet. This is the case of those who maintain and profess that they are followers of Christ and members of the Church, without obtaining the "wedding garment" of grace, which engenders a living faith, hope and love. It is true that this "garment" more internal than external is given by God himself, the author of grace and of every good which the soul possesses. But the parable emphasizes the responsibility that every guest has, whatever his or her origin, regarding the acceptance of his law, the total response to the demand of the Christian vocation and an ever greater participation in the life of the Church.

In the parable of the 10 virgins "who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom" (Mt 25:1), Jesus also uses the wedding analogy to explain his idea of the kingdom of God and the Church in which this kingdom is made concrete. Here we also find his insistence on the need for that interior disposition without which one cannot attend the wedding banquet. In this parable Jesus calls us to be ready, vigilant and fervently committed in waiting for the Bridegroom. Only five of the 10 virgins made the effort so that their lamps would be burning when the Bridegroom arrived. The other careless ones were lacking oil. "The bridegroom came and those who were ready went into the wedding feast with him. Then the door was locked" (Mt 25:10). It is a discreet but unmistakable reference to the lot of those who lack the interior disposition needed for meeting God, and thus lack fervour and perseverance in waiting; a reference therefore, to the threat of seeing the door closed in one's face. Once again we find an appeal being made to one's sense of responsibility concerning the Christian vocation.