

# Reflections on the Gospel

## INVITED TO THE BANQUET OF LIFE

The parable of the Wedding Banquet symbolises the story of salvation. The banquet represents God's intent for human beings, which is simply to have us as honoured guests at the banquet of life. The bridegroom is Jesus. The servants sent out to issue the invitations are, first, the Old Testament prophets and then Christian missionaries. The response of the king to those who rejected the invitations reflects early Christian belief that the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE was retribution for failure to accept Jesus as Messiah. The new invitees from the highways and byways are Gentiles (non-Jews) who have joined the Church in large numbers.

We should not too readily identify the king in the parable with God. Jesus takes illustrations from life as it is, using aspects of the way people, including kings, behave to illustrate what he wants to convey.

The parable thus serves as an *explanation* of otherwise disturbing developments. Israel's *No* to the Gospel and the fact that the Church includes bad members as well as good has all been foreseen by the Lord.

What about the poor wretch caught out for not wearing a wedding garment? The wedding garment symbolises transformation of life. You don't have to be good to *get into* the community of the Kingdom: the invitation to the banquet is a great net of grace enclosing all, good and bad alike. But, *once within*, we must allow the grace we have received to transform us and make us worthy of final salvation, God's invitation to the banquet of life.

**Brendan Byrne, SJ**