**26th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST**

The weeks between Thanksgiving and Christmas are filled with a flurry of activity. Dinners and parties abound. We receive invitations from neighbors, friends, colleagues at work, and family. Some parties and dinners we will attend.

In today’s Gospel reading, Jesus tells a story about someone who threw a dinner party, “*Someone gave a great dinner and invited many*” (v.16). This ‘someone’ possessed a ‘slave’ who tells the invited guests: “*Come, for everything is ready now*”.

How do the invitees respond when the dinner is ready? Jesus says, “*They all alike began to make excuses*”. The word ‘excuses’ implies some illegitimate reasons. But wait a minute, one guy ‘bought a piece of land’ and had to go see it. Another bought ‘five yoke of oxen’ and needed to try them out and a third had ‘just been married’ . These three people seem to have perfectly legitimate reasons for not being able to attend the banquet. After all, doesn’t taking care of the home and the family, and the job that provides for both, take priority over a banquet invite?

If we look at how the Church Fathers and Saints interpret the passage, we can begin to understand why these three reasons are not reasons at all but excuses. They say that the ‘someone’ who hosts the great supper/banquet is none other than God the Father. They say that the slave is God’s Son Jesus Christ. They say that the invited guests are those who proclaim faith in God. That would be you and me. And finally, the Church Fathers and Saints interpret the great banquet as the heavenly feast of the Kingdom of God. So, the underlying message is that no excuse, not home, not job, not even family, is good enough to skip out on God’s great banquet.

So, as we think about all our invites to dinners and parties during this holiday season, let us be aware of one very important celebration that we absolutely must attend. Each and every one of us has been invited. God our Father throws a Christmas dinner party every year. It’s a birthday celebration for His Son, Jesus Christ, who was born on December 25th.

The Church selects today’s Gospel to be read on the Second Sunday before December 25th every year to emphasize this coming Feast, its importance, and the special invitation that is extended to all of us.

How will we answer?

At the very least, the gospel offers us a “what not to do”

There are so many societal pressures…so many responsibilities laid out at our feet day after day.  Our careers, our family, our other social obligations take up SO MUCH OF OUR TIME, that by the end of the day there seems to be nothing left for God.

How many times have you recently said to a family member or a friend:

“I can’t believe Christmas is just a week away…I have SO MUCH TO DO!”
I heard a priest say once that it during this time of year, we become to busy to live…and to busy to die.

At the Nativity of our Lord, even on the very day that God came into the World, after all of the invitations were sent out by the forefathers throughout the centuries they were too busy for God.  There was no room at the inn.

We hear in the Gospel of John:  *“Christ came unto His own…and His own people where not there to receive Him.”*

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, the banquet lies before us today.  It is not some superficial place that we will get to eventually after we pass away…it is here….it is now.  The Gospel today says:  “Come NOW, for all things are ready.”

Remember…this…gospel lesson.  Read it over and over again.  Study the invite that has been given to you by the Holy Forefathers, Apostles, Saints, and Fathers of the Church.  Slow down this week, and take the time to pray, fast, and prepare for the Feast which will begin --------, Christmas Eve, at 7:00 PM.

Our salvation depends on putting away all our excuses, accepting the invitation, and extending the same invitation to others. “Advent” means ‘coming’. Christ, the eternal Word & Son of God, is coming to us as a little child during this season. But are *we* coming to Him? Are we coming to His birthday party this year? Are we coming to His resurrection banquet every Sunday? And who will we bring with us? Amen!