**28th 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, family. Some parties and dinners we will attend. Others we may wish to attend but are unable and a few of these events we will try to avoid.

In today’s Gospel reading, Jesus tells a story about someone who threw a dinner party. This ‘someone’ must have had substantial wealth in order to throw this dinner because Jesus refers to it as a ‘great’ banquet, and He says 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*”. 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 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, 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.

The mystical supper of Christ and the Apostles. This mystical supper is celebrated every Divine Liturgy. Thus, God the Father puts on a great banquet every Sunday and every time we celebrate a liturgy. Do we have an excuse for not being here on Sundays? Will we have an excuse for not being here on Christmas day? Working on our land, our yard, our house, our rental property, although not bad in and of themselves, when we allow them to interfere with attending God’s great banquet, they become an excuse. Likewise, we cannot use the yoke of our job, profession, or occupation as an excuse.

If we think that God does not care about rejecting His invitation or it is acceptable excuse because He knows that we really want to be there, we are sadly mistaken. God the Father does care. We know He cares deeply because Jesus relates that the master became angry. God does not get angry because He is somehow offended at being rejected. Rather, His anger results from knowing and seeing the unnecessary problems we bring upon ourselves when our priorities are upside down. He cares deeply for us. God does not shut us out of the dinner. We shut ourselves out with our own excuses. Neither does God force us to attend the His banquet. He respects our free will even when we reject His invitation. Even when the consequences are direly negative for us.

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!