

## DRESS CODE FOR THE KINGDOM

***But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. And he said to him, "Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?" Matthew 22:11***

Have you ever had it happen? You go to a club and the doorman looks you over. I can't let you in there sir. Fortunately I have an extra. A tie appears. The date is saved. You enter the club. These kinds of events are increasingly rare. You almost have to be some sort of celebrity to have experienced it. Though rare, it happens. Those in the military know most about dress codes. For such soldiers, showing up to the event in the wrong uniform isn't just an embarrassment. It's "going on report". And depending on the event it's "soldier you're not getting in" and marched off to the barracks you are. In private schools but also an increasing number of public schools uniform policies are in effect. Dressed in the dark? Mistook the red trousers for the grey? If you managed to get to school without noticing, the classroom door remains closed and you go to the office. None of these experiences resonate with you? Well most of us have at least seen the signs in the summer "No shirt. No shoes. No service".

Many an entertaining story comes out of the context of those who somehow slipped past the doorman, the duty officer, the teacher, or the proprietor. But no one escapes the notice of the Almighty. The king, not only sees his guests in a general way but examines each and every guest individually. Even in the midst of a crowd no one – not a single guest – would escape his scrutiny. "Their ways are continually before Him, they cannot be hidden from their eyes". The question we should be asking is "Will I meet the dress code for heaven?"

Yes, we still have dress codes on earth and guess what, so does heaven. Heaven is described as the marriage feast of the Lamb". And of all the places for the 1<sup>st</sup> century Jew to have a dress code, the wedding was that place. And I know what you're thinking. I'm lucky to die with my boots on let alone have something known as a "wedding garment". Yet this is exactly what is needed to enter into the marriage feast of the Lamb.

Fortunately for us, it isn't the kind of material thing we can just forget to put on one day. It is unseen yet nevertheless real. The believer is instructed from both Old and New Testaments is instructed to "be clothed with righteousness".

For he has **clothed** me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of **righteousness**, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. (Isaiah 61:10)(See also 2 Chronicles 6:41)

<sup>25</sup>But now that this faith has come, we are no longer under the control of a guardian. <sup>26</sup>You are all God's children by believing in Christ Jesus. <sup>27</sup>Clearly, all of you who were baptized in Christ's name have **clothed yourselves with Christ**. (Galatians 3:25-28) HCSB

Isaiah is clear on who does the work. It is "He" who has clothed me. Paul explains how the clothing takes place in the New Testament. It is being clothed in baptism.

Now the parable ought to give us great hope. I mentioned in my introduction how it is that unless you are some kind of celebrity, or world traveller or some kind of elite, it's unlikely that you've ever been close to a place with an enforced dress code. But that's not God's plan as we approach heaven's gate. He started with elites to be certain. Even Jesus said: "I come to the Jews and then the Gentiles". They were supposed to have

the spiritual edge. They were the chosen people of God. But we know what happened, even as this parable teaches. They spurned the invitation from the Almighty King.

So what did the Almighty King do? He sent his servants out onto the highways and byways. They gathered in as “many as they could find”. And they found “both the good and the bad”. They found those who the world perceived to be both the good and the bad. They were brought before the king. And the king, as wedding hosts of old, gave them all their wedding garments.

Isn't that a wonderful tradition? No longer are the women worried about that dress. No longer are the men worried about what status they might convey. All are given their wedding garments from their hosts – all are made to feel equal guests before the King. It is as St. Paul concludes his discussion of the matter: “Now there are neither Jews nor Greeks, slaves nor free people, males nor females. You are all the same in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

This is a parable about God's grace. He gathers us all, whoever consents to be gathered. It doesn't matter about you're past. It doesn't matter about your noble or commoner lineage. It doesn't matter if you are particularly fashion conscious or popular or socially adept. He gathers them all “the good and the bad” and he clothes them.

He clothes us in garments of salvation and the righteousness of Christ.

What an opportunity! We have people in our midst who struggle with self-worth. We have Satan who lives up to the meaning of his name “Accuser” who having tricked them into transgressing God's law turns around to tell them how hopeless they really are. There are many who think themselves simply burdens. As I mentioned last week, there are even those with such thoughts who would take their own lives.

But look up! You are clothed with the righteousness of Christ. You are worthy to stand in the presence of the King of Kings. I'll never forget. I meet a man who had an invitation to dine with the Queen. Of course, it was one of those functions with a few hundred. But nevertheless it was an honour. It is an honour that most of us will never realistically have.

But we have an invitation to dine with true Royalty and it won't be for just a moment. It is eternity.

Jesus put on the righteousness of Christ that the Father drapes around your shoulders without shrugging it off. And you shall be saved. It's inconceivable that anyone would but there are some.

I'm reminded of a confirmation in another place and another time far removed from here. The girl, about 14 had invested much money and time in a confirmation dress. And it was beautiful. No I don't want to put on an alb she said. And her mother agreed. It might wrinkle my dress. We worked hard on it. I think of how that dress episode reflects the spiritual lives of people including the man in our parable who tried to enter the marriage feast of the Lamb without his wedding garment.

Some of us have pride in the things that we do, the accomplishments we believe that we should take credit for. We want to blow our own horn. We want the civil righteousness which the world values to be ours and ours alone to shine through all eternity.

But the Christian attitude is one of humility. The Prophet Isaiah had many things and deeds to which a careful biographer could give credit for. He was eloquent at times and perseverant at others. Yet this same man, knowing the state of his sinful soul was able to write through insight given by the Holy Spirit.

<sup>6</sup> But we are all like an unclean *thing*,  
 And all our righteousnesses *are* like filthy rags;  
 We all fade as a leaf,  
 And our iniquities, like the wind,  
 Have taken us away. (Isaiah 64:6)

He knew that there was nothing in his hand he could bring to effect his own salvation. He instructed others likewise. There is no hope other than to be cloaked in the righteousness of Christ. St. Paul fulfills the imagery revealing to us that it is in baptism we are protected by the blood of the Lamb who turns away God's righteous wrath against us. It is more protective than a fireman's suit against the flames of God's judgment.

Consider the girl in the confirmation dress episode. She learned more confirmation that day than all the two years combined. Yes, on our confirmation day we affirm our baptism. She wore the righteousness of Christ symbolized by the white alb.

The man in our parable, taken out of the King's presence to the utter darkness obviously did not. In the eyes of the world he could even have been one of the "good" that was gathered. But the Almighty has a special vision. He can see beyond what we see, to our very soul and the motives of the mind. He finds the cracks in our holy veneer. And as he loves passionately so also does he judge zealously. The sin, though it be the size of a microbe must be eradicated. He must not suffer its entrance into the holy realm. For we all know that disease, even if it comes in something as small as the unseen microbe brings death.

The man is cast out into the outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

If we draw the cloak of Christ's righteousness a little tighter around us today, we're off to a good start. Speak passionately of the righteousness of Christ. Speak of your gift of holy baptism, especially if you serve as a sponsor. Shudder at the news if a family member decides not to baptise their child. Retreat behind the safety of the cloak of Christ's righteousness when Satan fires his missiles of temptation. Support the work of the Church that seeks to fulfill her mandate to "baptize all nations".

The parables of Christ ought not to leave us wondering "What now should I believe?" or "What now ought I to do?" The parable has been proclaimed. May we ever praise His holy name.

Amen.