

- I Almost hidden in this long gospel today are two reasons given by two of the invitees for not attending the wedding banquet prepared by the king for his son in the parable told by Jesus. After the king sends his servants a second time to those invited we are told “Some ignored the invitation and went away, one to his farm, another to his business.” Notice the reasons are not immoral. They don’t go off to gamble away their life savings or to waste their money on frivolous entertainment. In fact they are going off to do something responsible. The farmer is tending to his crops thus making an effort to provide for his family. It is most likely a small family farm and he has work to do if his family is to be fed. We don’t know the business of the second person, only that he too thought he needed to pay attention to his livelihood more than attending a banquet which would only take up his valuable time. Let me suggest this situation of not attending the banquet is where we are today with Mass attendance.
- A. Most commentators look at today’s gospel with the parable of the king throwing a wedding banquet for his son as pointing toward God the Father offering us a place at the heavenly banquet with Jesus. It is the offer of salvation extended by God to each of us. Without denying this obvious theme of the heavenly banquet, commentators also express the reality of

the banquet offered to us every Sunday. Actually it is offered daily but the major weekly celebration is of course on Saturday evening and Sunday. We are all aware of how Mass attendance has fallen over the past 50 years and at an increasing rate. Most countries in Europe have a Mass attendance in single digits, like only 5 or 6 percent of the Catholic and Christian population regularly attends Sunday services. Here in the United States we are still at double digit figures of high teens or in the twenties for the percentage of Catholics attending Mass on weekends.

- B. The lack of attendance is seen in all the age groups but most severely in younger people, who not only do not attend religious services on weekends but some claim to have no religious affiliation at all. They claim no particular religious faith. It is troubling especially if your children or grandchildren are part of the statistic of not attending religious services and in particular coming to the Catholic Church. They may come to Christmas and Easter Masses, which is good to see, but that infrequent participation is not completely satisfying for parents and grandparents.
- C. How do we understand this lack of Mass attendance? Much research has been done in this area and it is ongoing, breaking down the numbers according to age groups. My research has not been that precise but I

do read the professional research. (By the way our parish has an evangelization team that is contacting registered parishioners who do not appear to be active in the parish. We contact them in writing, by phone and in person. The fact that they took the time to register is a good thing so we are trying to build on that with some success but not as much as we would like. If you want to be involved in this effort call the office).

- D. What I have found in talking to my brother priests about this concern of a lack of Mass attendance or some level of involvement in the parish is first that we are all experiencing it. No parish is exempt. The same is true for our Protestant brothers and sisters. They are seeing the same thing as we are. Sometimes we find that someone is divorced and married again and they think they are out of the church. They sense they do not really belong. Or, a person or family had a bad experience with a priest or deacon and sometimes with a lay person who told them to get out of their seat. (It's true). These issues, if we are fortunate enough to find them are workable. They can often be fixed or healed.
- E. However, often we don't find these kind of issues. The more troubling responses and the more difficult with which to work is when there is no particular issue. To generalize, the idea is "Sunday is a day of

rest for us. We both work all week, so the weekend is a family time of soccer and other sports. We take it easy. We're not bad people. We're registered in the Church so we can receive the sacraments when we need to do so but we don't really have any anger at the Church. Hey, thanks for stopping by." It's hard to grab on to that. You want to say, "You know you will have to stand before God someday."

- F. Now some of you may have children and grandchildren in this category or close to it. I know that is troubling for you and I know you pray for them. Keep praying, please. It seems that people today hear the message of the culture, the message of their peers, a lot more than the message of the Church. The message of the culture blots out any message of the Church. It has an amazing power. The Church wants to speak to them and tries but is not providing a message that captures their attention. The younger families are up to their eyes in working long hours, raising children, being an uber service for their children running them to one sports event after another and feeling exhausted when Sunday rolls around. Also, the grandparents are helping in this effort and still everyone is so busy.
- G. For the young families, and there are many in this parish, who are very involved in the Church, in the activities of the school, sports activities held here and

continue to be here every weekend, I say thank you. You are doing an amazing job of raising your children. Keep up the good work. You are a great example for all of us.

- H. For those parents of adult children who are not attending Church, do not look back and say oh I could have done more to educate them in the faith. You did what seemed right at the time. Don't beat yourself up. But, do continue to pray for them. Pope Benedict was very compassionate when he spoke about people who only come to the Church on Christmas and Easter. He said not to be harsh with them. He said that this is how they identify with the Church right now. God is with them.
- I. I plan to speak more about the Church's relationship with the culture in the near future. It is a large issue. Let us continue to pray for each other and the Church.