

## Come to the Wedding Banquet

St. Ann's  
10/15/17  
Fr. Jim Plough

Perhaps the most difficult part of today's parable of the wedding feast (Matthew 22: 1-14) is to comprehend why the king threw out the man not wearing a wedding garment. Everyone was invited, including street people who couldn't afford a decent pair of pants, let alone a festive garment.

Remember that this story is an allegory. All the parts stand for something else. We are not talking literally about a banquet given by a king, who invites chosen guests and discovers that some ignore the invitation, making flimsy excuses of one kind or another. When the king decides to invite everyone, good and bad, one shows up ill-clad and gets booted out. This story is an allegory.

In reality, the king issuing the invitation is God himself, who at first chooses an elect group of people, the chosen ones, to share in the banquet of heaven. As a people, they are not faithful, and so God extends the invitation beyond those chosen. In the end, all are chosen. But it is not enough just to show up.

In Matthew's time, the ceremonial robe for Christians was their baptismal garment, symbolic of conversion. On becoming a Christian through baptism, the candidate received a new identity, putting away the old life and embracing the new. This was symbolized by the putting on of a white robe, a new set of clothes appropriate for the new way of life. That new way of life was to be characterized by bearing fruit. It was not enough to simply show up, go through the ceremony, and be done with it. Those called needed to recognize the value of the banquet and the challenge to which they were called. That is what "being Christian" is!

We know what stewardship means in a Christian context, sharing one's goods with the needy, caring for those disadvantaged. On Friday, I celebrated with the IHM community a funeral of a faithful Christian, Bill Kohl, who gave 25 of his 94 years volunteering at Grand Valley Catholic Outreach. With his wife, Mary, Bill

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participated in weekly Liturgies at IHM parish. Bill loved to serve as a lector and he and Mary both cherished the Eucharist in a special way. It happens that yesterday was the 22nd Empty Bowls soup and bread luncheon at Catholic Outreach. It was not a sumptuous banquet, but a very extensive and pleasant gathering of friends and supporters from all over the valley! Bill Kohl worked in preparation for Empty Bowls for 20 years, inviting potters and restaurants for donations, distributing tickets, and assisting in the event itself. Yesterday's celebration held precious memories of Bill's stewardship. The event was the most well-attended gathering in the history of empty bowls.

I want to mention now a person who excelled in stewardship in a secular context. We have witnessed outstanding stewards in the careers of Bill Gates and Warren Buffett, who have divested themselves of billions in works of charity. My favorite philanthropist did something less, but he could have remained a princely millionaire had he not chosen the road to philanthropy instead.

Most remember him as a movie star, with five decades of achievement in leading roles such as "Cool Hand Luke" and "The Hustler." And others. In 1982, with the help of a friend, he started a little company featuring a new recipe for an oil and vinegar dressing. The venture was mostly a joke, but success led to expansion. Today, "Newman's Own" food products, including pasta sauces, salad dressings, and pop corn,, are featured in grocery stores everywhere. He smiling face adorns each container. Yes, we are talking about Paul Newman, movie icon and philanthropist, who died nine year ago at the age of 83.

Newman stipulated that all profits from "Newman's Own" products were to go to charities. At the time of his death, \$250,000,000 dollars had been distributed. I continue to support this kind of secular stewardship by purchasing "Newman's Own" pasta sauces for my Italian concoctions. Friends are critical of my neglect in

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not creating my own recipe, but my culinary skills extend to employing no more than three ingredients for any culinary preparation.

Newman's favorite philanthropic program came to be called the "Hole in the Wall Gang," taken from the movie "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid." Today's gang refers to some eleven free-of-charge camps for children with life-threatening illnesses.

On the occasion of Newman's death, the Wall Street Journal included an article entitled "What CEO's Can Learn from Paul Newman." The article described Newman's work in founding the Committee Encouraging Corporate Philanthropy (CECP), an effort to encourage corporations to change the way they conduct business and make corporate giving an integral part of their organization. Newman's passion for philanthropy was rooted in the strong belief that we have an obligation as individuals and companies to give back some of the benefits that we were granted as free and prosperous citizens of the United States. Newman was not Catholic, but his stewardship principles certainly resonate with Catholic teaching. In the light of current denunciations of corporate greed in the United States, I continue to absorb this wall street article like a breath of fresh air.

Asked to explain his motivation behind philanthropic giving, Newman responded simply by saying "it seems so human to hold your hand out to people less fortunate than you are." The Journal writers commented: "This quote embodies the generous spirit of a man committed not only to giving back, but to inspiring the world to see the value of social responsibility."

Our gospel today spoke of not just showing up at the wedding feast, going through the ceremony, and being done with it, but of realizing that our baptismal garment requires that we bear fruit, That is what "being Christian" means! Something more

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is expected. We may not be rich or athletically or musically or mathematically gifted, but we nonetheless have been given everything we need in order to bear fruit worthy of the gift of heaven. That is what practicing stewardship means.

St. Paul addresses us today, as he spoke to Christians in Philippi: “Brothers and sisters, I know how to live in humble circumstances; I know also how to live with abundance....I can do all things in him who strengthens me ( Philippians 4: 12-14).” We pray for the courage to live in our times as St. Paul did, one of the first Christian philanthropists, whether we live in humble circumstances or in abundance.