

Father Dave's Weekly Homily

10/09/11 28 A

-- This past week former Chicago Bears lineman Dan Hampton declined an invitation to a White House dinner with the President for his 1986 Super Bowl Championship Team. Due to the Challenger space shuttle disaster, the team did not have the traditional dinner at that time, and President Obama wanted to offer them this opportunity on the 25th anniversary of their victory.

-- Hampton listed a few reasons for declining the invitation, and much was written about how legitimate these reasons were. In today's gospel a number of people decline the king's invitation to a wedding banquet. The excuses they give are definitely not matters of urgency.

-- It's pretty clear that the gospel writer envisioned this wedding banquet as the heavenly banquet, where Jesus Christ is the honored bridegroom. Why would people refuse the invitation to this heavenly banquet?

-- Perhaps some like their lives just as they are and don't want them to be disturbed. Life on earth is just fine for them, thank you. We could call them "practical atheists."

-- Perhaps some others simply refuse to believe that heaven can be like this. They envision a heaven for the elite, perhaps for the religious elite. Most of all, many may refuse to come when they find out who else will be there. *My crusty old neighbor who yelled at my kids is coming? I don't want to be in his presence!*

-- But our God is very inclusive in his invitation. He goes out to the highways and byways. He invites the rich and the poor and those in between. He calls those who seem to have initiative and those who appear to be lazy.

-- Indeed, in the words of the gospel, he fills the banquet hall with all he can find, good and bad alike. That may bother some of us who think only the good can come (and, of course, we know we're among the good).

-- Yes, in the words of St. Paul, God wants all to be saved and to come to the knowledge of his truth. Then, what's the meaning of this man who isn't dressed properly and gets kicked out because of this fact? It doesn't make much sense, given the lengths God went to in order to get people into the heavenly banquet.

-- I could give the scholar's answer that this is a separate story tacked on to the story of the wedding banquet. But that's not very satisfactory. After all, it was tacked on for a good reason.

-- Some scripture scholars guess that the garment was the white garment people put on when they were baptized. But then, some baptized people may not get into heaven, and others who have not been formally baptized can experience God's eternal presence.

-- Perhaps the best explanation is that we are all free to accept or reject God's presence with us, even when we are at the entrance to heaven. God does not force us to come into his supper.

-- We must come to the heavenly banquet on God's terms, not ours. And the bottom line is love (as St. Augustine called the wedding garment). We can only enjoy heaven if we attempt to reflect God's love as best we can by doing good for others, as our opening prayer says. And that love is inclusive, embracing even those we regard as enemies or at least a pain to deal with.

-- It's one thing to decline an invitation to an important dinner, even one given by a public figure. It's quite another thing to refuse the invitation to the heavenly banquet, due to our own selfishness or hatred of others.

-- Authentic love is the one thing that will ensure that we accept the invitation to God's eternal life.