

The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son; and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding; and they would not come.

This is a strange parable. Why would the guests not want to come to the wedding? And it's even more strange than it seems – these are all guests who have already said yes, but when the great day approaches, they make their excuses. What's going on?

It appears that at least part of the problem is the appearance of what the tradition calls *akedia* or *accidie*. St Thomas Aquinas describes the sin of *accidie* or sloth as 'a sadness at the divine good', a sadness in the face of divine good.¹

The guests who refuse to come are turning their backs on joy, they are refusing joy. This refusal of joy, *accidie*, is not just laziness, but a spiritual paralysis that prevents us from rejoicing in what is beautiful or good.²

Accidie is a kind of boredom or discouragement which came paired with not wanting to do anything, or which can be paired with whirling activity, any activity, anything which will distract us from the void which we feel inside.³

Maybe you are not convinced by this diagnosis – a refusal of joy. Perhaps you think that there are some kind of wedding feasts which are not very attractive, not very joyful. I once had an almost allergic to wedding receptions. There are many reasons, some good reasons, while people may not like wedding receptions.

But this is not just a merely-human wedding reception. This is a parable, and the wedding and the dinner in the parable are together a feast of divine-human joy. This is a divine-human dinner which is also a wedding, a celebration which is the consummation and fulfilment of all our hopes, all our desires. In the words of Dr Pusey God is 'a boundless Ocean of love....one Eternal flow of Infinite Unchanging Bliss'.⁴

The invitation to the wedding feast is an invitation to step into what we have been given, 'one Eternal flow of Infinite Unchanging Bliss'. Why would anyone refuse that?

¹ 'tristitia de bono divino', see *Christ our Joy*, Joseph Murphy, p 32, and *Le démon de midi*, Nault.

² On the one hand, *accidie* 'gives us a distaste for everything that exists in our life, and of the other hand, a desire for all that is not there'. *Preparing for Confession: Life in Christ, Healing and Ascetic Therapy*, By the Monks of the Hermitage of the Annunciation, Watford-New Germany, Nova Scotia: 'This explains why the symptoms of despondency can be contradictory: either being lifeless (lack of energy and enthusiasm) or being agitated and over active.... They develop an aversion for the place where they live or work or the life they have: they want to change, yet if they change and leave, they end up unstable, never satisfied or happy'

³ Drawing on Jean-Charles Nault, O.S.B., *The Noonday Devil: Acedia, the Unnamed Evil of our Times*, Ignatius Press

⁴ 'God is Uncreated, Unlimited, Unlimitable Love, Essential Love, in Himself. Love is the Divine Essence. The life of God is Love. His Eternal Being is Infinite Love, having its full contentment in Itself, because the Father, Who is Infinite Love, ever loveth the Son and is beloved by Him; and the One Love of the Father and the Son ever breatheth forth the Holy Ghost, Who is Love, and returning to Them, completes the life of God.' 'The Mystery of the Trinity', 500.

In order to answer this question, and to see how we may find our way to the embrace of divine love in which we already live and move and have our being, let us step back.

Why do marriages feature so significantly in the Scriptures? In one sense, the Bible is an extended account of courtship and marriage. The Bible begins by describing the love, wisdom, and goodness of God over-flowing in creation. The rest of the Bible is an account of how all that has come from God, all that is given life with God, then finds, by and in the love and wisdom of God, a more wonderful way back to God.

In particular, we are invited to celebrate the marriage of the divine-human bridegroom with the beautiful and grace-adorned Bride of Christ. This is not just for married people in a merely-human sense. No, this the really all-inclusive marriage, a marriage that includes all who belong to Christ, all members of the body of Christ—we are each of us and together the Spouse of the divine bridegroom.

Gregory the Great sums up the dominant tradition among the early interpreters:

‘God the Father made a marriage for God the Son when [the Father] joined [the Son] to human nature in the womb of the virgin, when [the Father with the Son] willed that He Who was God before all ages should at the end of ages become man... We can clearly and securely maintain that the Father made a marriage for the King His Son in this: that through the mystery of the Incarnation He joined Him to the Holy Church. And the womb of the Virgin Mother was the bridal chamber of This Spouse.’⁵

This contemplation of the meaning of this marriage, the contemplation of the Incarnation, is a key part of the teaching of the Oxford movement and of Dr Pusey.⁶ For Pusey also, our Lord could be said to marry the Church to himself in His Incarnation, when He willed to unite His own Deity with our humanity forever.⁷

⁵ Gregory the Great, on the Gospels, available online at [Lectionary central](#) for Trinity 20 or in Toal, *The Sunday Sermons of the Great Fathers*, vol. iv, for Trinity 19, p 202.

‘We do indeed confess that He has existence in and from two natures; but we shun as evil the belief that He is made up from two persons. We can therefore clearly and securely maintain that the Father made a marriage for the King His Son in this, that through the mystery of the Incarnation He joined Him to the Holy Church. And the womb of the Virgin Mother was the bridal chamber of This Spouse. And because of this the Psalmist says: He hath set his tabernacle in the sun: and he, as a bridegroom coming out of his bride-chamber (Ps. xviii. 6). As a Bridegroom He came forth from His bridal chamber: for God Incarnate came forth from the immaculate womb of the Virgin to unite the Church to Himself.’

John the Baptist calls Christ the ‘Bridegroom’, and the title ‘bridegroom’ is one of those which our Lord uses to describe himself, ‘the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them.’ Jn 3.29 ‘the friend of the bridegroom ...rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice’. Matt 9.15 ‘the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them’

⁶ The Word and wisdom of God, the One who the Father speaks in Genesis Chapter one, the Word, through whom all things are made, comes into the world he already sustains at every moment, the Son of God takes on human nature.

⁷ See Pusey, *The Minor Prophets*, on Hosea 2.19, for the three espousals, which I’ve paraphrased and adapted here: Three times especially did the Lord espouse the Church to himself. First in His Incarnation, when He willed to unite His own Deity with our humanity forever. The marriage takes place, secondly, on the cross when the Bridegroom’s side is opened, when the of blood and the water flowing from his side figure the sacramental life of the Church, when he washed her with his blood, and bought her by his own death. This marriage takes place, thirdly, on the day of Pentecost, when the Son with the Father pours out the Holy Spirit upon the Bride, whereby He dwelleth in her and she in Him.

We've been celebrating the 140th anniversary of the foundation of Pusey House on 9 October, 1884. On that day, the Bishop of Oxford gathered with the new community in what was a Georgian House on St Giles. These buildings and chapel were dedicated 30 years later in 1914. On that 9 October, the Bishop addressed invited the community to live in such a way so that their new friends, those who would come to the House to share in the life of this House, would become more dear friends of Christ.⁸ How wonderful, this is still our vocation—we are to help one another to be friends of Christ, and so also good and true friends to one another.

Dr Pusey's emphasis on the Incarnation has been a core part of the invitation which this House extends to others. I'm going to repeat a few words now which were part of the message I prepared for the 140th celebrations. They are an attempt to describe our vocation:

In Christ, says Dr Pusey, we are 'In-Godded, Deitate'. This means that human words speak divine wisdom, earthly signs communicate heavenly life – In the marriage feast we celebrate today – bread and wine give us, really and truly, the life of God –

ordinary community, this community, so many other communities, beyond number, are shaped into the grace-filled body of Christ,

the academy—this university even, may become by God's grace a school open to divine truth.

Through the lens of the Incarnation, we can see the high ideal and vocation that we living out in all forms of study:

'What are all our sciences, what are all our fragments of knowledge, all our forms of studying and learning, but droplets from that fountain of which we long to drink in all its fulness? *My soul is athirst for God, yea, even for the living God.*'⁹

The sacramental principle and the catholic life which inspired the leaders of the Oxford Movement still speaks to contemporary needs, and answers the deep longings of the heart. All things, stamped with the impress of divine life and creation, all things shine, in some measure, with divine light.¹⁰

⁸ The Bishop addressed the Librarians and admitted them to their office. He said of them that 'they were to do whatever God might put it into their hearts to do for His cause;... their daily life would by their own choice be ordered by a simple rule... not so unbending as to repel the guests whom they desired to make their friends and their Master's friends too; they would be tolerant in controversy... united in charity to one another... diligent in study..'

⁹ Robert Crouse, 'Heavenly Avarice'.

¹⁰ This is adapted from the Principal's message for the 140th anniversary, 'Founding Principles, Present and Future Hope':

Dr Pusey's emphasis on the doctrine of the Incarnation embodies a wonderful affirmation. In Christ, we are 'In-Godded, Deitate', human words speak divine wisdom, earthly signs communicate heavenly life, ordinary community is shaped into the grace-filled body of Christ, the academy becomes a school open to divine truth, and all things shine, in some measure, with divine light. This affirmation brings also a bracing challenge: to live into who we are in Christ, and to be transformed, not for ourselves, but for one another. The world desperately needs such Christiform disciples and Spirit-enlivened communities.

It is both a privilege and a delight to see how the combined offering of liturgy, study, and community, continues to encourage and inspire those who are drawn into the life of Pusey House: 'What are all our sciences, what are all our fragments of knowledge, all our forms of studying and learning, but droplets from that fountain of which we long to drink in all its fulness? *My soul is athirst for God, yea, even for the living God.*' The sacramental principle and the catholic life which inspired the leaders of the Oxford Movement still meet both contemporary

This affirmation brings also a bracing challenge: We are invited, called by the King's servants, to live into who we are in Christ. We are invited to come to the wedding, His wedding, and our wedding, to come and to be transformed, not for ourselves only, but for one another. We are invited, to live into who we are in Christ, to be transformed for ourselves and those we love, yes, but to transformed also for the world and Church we are called to love and to serve. This is the invitation to the wedding and the wedding feast. The world desperately needs us all to hear and respond to the invitation. And the invitation is not made just once. The invitation is made to us again today – we've said yes already, we are here. But the invitation is a challenge, because we have accepted, it will be made again, and it will be more challenging more demanding, more full of hope and joy. We have been married to the Divine Bridegroom, but will this marriage be our life and our home? Will we continue to walk toward the wedding and the dinner which is the consummation and completion of the divine human marriage, the wedding supper of the Lamb of God?

Why is it so hard to respond to this invitation? Why would anyone refuse. We have been made for God, but we have also been caught up in the un-making of what has been made for God. We have been, all of us, in some way disfigured or bent out of shape by the un-love and blindness of the world. Indeed, we have often chosen this un-love, we have chosen against love, and against God's goodness. We know it, we feel it, it weights us down. Like the man on the stretcher last week, we know that at times we can barely move. We don't want to choose against joy, but we know that we do. Thanks be to God—this is not the most fundamental truth about ourselves. We have been remade in Christ—God's image has been reformed in us, we have been called to the wedding, we are already there, now we are invited to become who we are. In the confession, we are invited to lay down what does not belong to our calling, and to embrace more resolutely the invitation we have already accepted.

A good way to understand this invitation is to think of it in terms of vocation. Vocation comes from *vocare*, to call. God has called us – We have heard God's voice, we are here together this morning. Vocation is sometimes reduced to describe those who are considering ordination to the priesthood. That is one of the way God can call us. However, vocation is more basic, vocation is God's voice calling us to the marriage which he has made for his son.

'Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars: the seven gifts of the Spirit shape us into a living temple, a spiritual building.

Wisdom hath killed her beasts; she hath mingled her wine; she hath also furnished her table.

Or, more truly: the Divine Wisdom Jesus Christ has given his life for us on the cross, he gave over his life, he has mingled his wine, he has done all this on the beautiful and terrible cross which is also the tree of life.

And here, of course, we come to the centre of things. The divine-human cross is at the centre of time, at the centre of the cosmos, at the centre of our lives. In the invitation, we are invited to life, but also to death. We are invited to put to death all forms of unlove in us. And we are invited, with the divine son, to lay down our lives in divine freedom. We are invited to

needs, and the same old and deep longings of the heart, and these all serve as graceful keys to unlock the treasures of divine life, of evangelical zeal with love.

endure, with Christ and in him, because that only makes it possible, to endure in his embrace the particular form that the cross will take for us.

This week, when we celebrate the 140th anniversary of this House, we may in particular consider what it means to be living stones of the city of God, living stones in this particular community and home.

God has known us from all eternity, God knew already that we would be gathered here this morning.

We are shaped into living stones all together and each of us by the hands of the divine mason, the divine sculptor. The particular forms the cross takes for us, are the personal and all-together, corporate, in the body, disciplines and trials and struggles which are the blows of the mason's hammer.

Sometimes the cross takes the form of bad things which are done for us. But in the embrace of divine love and wisdom, even these blows which God did not choose for us, even these blows become the sculpting of divine love. This is why we can pray with John Donne: 'Batter my heart, three-person'd God'.

*Batter my heart, three-person'd God ...
That I may rise and stand,*

[Or in terms of today's invitation, that I may here and respond to your voice, your call]

*That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend
Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new.¹¹*

This is the work of the divine master sculptor.

¹¹ John Donne: 'Batter my Heart'

Batter my heart, three-person'd God, for you
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
That I may rise and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend
Your force to break, blow, burn, and make me new.
I, like an usurp'd town to'another due,
Labor to'admit you, but oh, to no end;
Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend,
But is captiv'd, and proves weak or untrue.
Yet dearly I love you, and would be lov'd fain,
But am betroth'd unto your enemy;
Divorce me, 'untie or break that knot again,
Take me to you, imprison me, for I,
Except you'enthrall me, never shall be free,
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me

We can hear the same guidance and voice in a more modern idiom and tone, in the words of the great Hungarian poet George Faludy – Faludy endured the cross-shaped hammer of a communist concentration camp –we hear Michealangelo speaking to the divine sculptor. These are Faludy’s words, Michealangelo speaking to God:¹²

Your anvil [O God] is the earth, and with your right arm
You span the arc of heaven like the sun.

...
I have myself become an ancient stone block,
... a still, curmudgeonly old rock,

But in my soul the old flame yet burns on.

How can Michealangelo then hear the invitation to the wedding and the wedding feast, asks Faludy?

Strike me, if you can love an aging sinner,
Strike here great Master Sculptor, My God. I am the stone.

I am the stone.

Brothers and sisters, we are called to be living stones, called to the divine-human wedding feast, each us. We are called precisely in the place where we find ourselves. We are called by the divine voice in the midst of our daily duties and cares, called as students, called at work, called at rest — God’s voice reaches us where we are, and we are called to become who we

¹² *Michelangelo’s Last Prayer* by George Faludy

Your anvil is the earth, and with your right arm
You span the arc of heaven like the sun.
Eight decades on this scaffolding a - lifetime -

I sought a sign of you, but there was none. [*Obviously, a ‘bad day’ for this imagined Michealangelo whose work shows evidence that he did recognize and see the divine signs*]

Under my chisel marble fell to stonedust,
But only torsos, idols would be born. [*It’s very unlikely Michealangelo would not have seen his creations as idols, but as a statement of the sense we have of the futility of merely-human efforts we can hear him speaking*]
I found you not, elusive, radiant, sunburst,
Who glowed there pulsing under every stone.

I have myself become an ancient stone block,
Split by vines, a still, curmudgeonly old rock,
But in my soul the old flame yet burns on.

How can I shed this flesh that holds me prisoner? [*There is an element of anti-flesh Gnosticism here, unless ‘flesh’ is being used in the technical sense as the part of us that rebels against God, ‘hatred, emulation, strife’, etc. The glorified flesh will be part of our resurrected selves, soul and body, another translation ‘How can I cast aside the body’s inner confines?’*]

Strike me, if you can love a hoary sinner,
Divine Sculptor, My God. I am the stone

are in Christ, called to the wedding feast. It will change how we live, it may change what we do, but we will live out that call in earthly signs and very ordinary divine-human-ways.

And yes, it is true, that if we accept this invitation, being shaped for divine joy, coming to the marriage celebration and to the feast, this also means that we will be sculpted by the divine master builder into living stones. We are invite to the feast, we enjoy it even now. The blows of the hammer will fall, but how we receive them, the kind of sculpture we become, that is profoundly affected by whether or not we respond to the invitation to lay our lives down with and in Christ.

In the wonderful economy of divine love, even the things which work against God become part of his shaping us – His love really does swallow up all that is unlove, it can make beautiful what is not beautiful, in ourselves or in the world.

Brothers and sisters, I will conclude very briefly with a word about the wedding garment. Sometimes this garment is described as the white robe of baptism, the garment of grace and Glory. For St Augustine, St Gregory, and many of the most insightful voices, the wedding garment is the garment of love:

‘Rightly is charity called a wedding garment: for our Creator wore this upon Him when He came to the marriage of Himself with the Church’.

This garment, says Gregory, is ‘twice dyed ... once with the love of God, and once with the love of neighbour’.¹³

Most basically – the garment is given, given by God’s Holy Spirit, given by God’s grace. We have to refuse to put it on in order to be without it. Oh dear, could I refuse? Yes, you can refuse, but you would know. I don’t think it’s possible to absolutely refuse the garment and to still be concerned about it. The garment is given, it is the robe of Christ’s grace and glory.

The wedding garment is the adornment of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us with dazzling brightness, the robe renewed and cleansed in the sacramental washing and food to which we come.

Yes, it’s possible for us to trail this garment in the mud, but even then, we are held in the divine and cleansing embrace.

We come again and again to be cleansed, raised up, restored, built together, given power to walk and to see, healed, fed. God has called us, let us come to the wedding feast. We are invited into a joy which is ours now and which will one day be complete. Let us seek to live into who we are in Christ, to share in the joy of the divine son which overflows in friendship and service.

¹³ Toal, p 232 , also the ‘Catena Aurea’, Toal, p 208: ‘What are we to understand by the nuptial garment, if not charity? Because it was in this the Lord clothed himself, when He came to espouse the Church to Himself. He therefore goes in to the wedding feast without a wedding garment, who has faith in the Church, but not love.’ See also, Augustine, ‘The Wedding Garment’, Toal, pp 221-22.