Oct. 15, 2017

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Is 25:6-10a
Phil 4:12-14, 19-20
Mt 22:1-14

By Fr. Mark Pranaitis, C.M., Executive Director of Catholic Charities for the Diocese of Indiana

Isaiah’s image of a banquet on a mountain top has been made visible in the remarkable efforts to feed (and help in so many other ways) those in the paths of hurricanes Harvey and Irma. It has warmed my heart to hear stories of people who simply sprang into action and made sure others who were wet, tired, stressed, worried, and dog-tired got, at the very least, a meal cooked and served by caring people. While surely the banquet on God’s mountain will be even better, to those flooded and fleeing, I’m sure the kindness of strangers was heaven's gift.

But my warm heart chills more than a little when faced with the Gospel’s parable. I have a hard time falling in love with God if he (Please forgive me the male pronoun just this once.) is as shallow as the king in the parable. Has anyone ever heard a reasonable explanation for the king kicking out the man who entered the banquet hall without a wedding garment? I haven’t. Is “wedding garment” code for “baptismal garment”? Even if it is, that doesn’t explain the harsh treatment inflicted upon the man. Neither am I consoled when people offer the truly touching image of Jesus coming to be with the kicked-out man since Jesus chooses to be with the outcasts. So Jesus goes after the ones the Father has kicked out? Does that make any sense?

Is it possible that the king isn’t God and his soon-to-married son isn’t Jesus and the servants aren’t the prophets? All these parallels seem so obvious (king = God; son = Jesus; servants = prophets, etc.). But the parallels do not hold up when we get to that man without his wedding garment.

Rather, in telling this parable, Jesus gets us to think about who God is and how God acts and it isn’t at all like the king who shows his true colors when faced with the improperly dressed man.

Yes, there will be a royal feast. And I who have ironed and buttoned-down my way through life had better be ready to sit next to someone I cannot kick out no matter how he or she is dressed.