

**HOMILY FOR THE MASS AT THE GENERAL CHAPTER OF THE CANOSSIAN  
SISTERS**

**18 Aug 2022**

We know very well the difficulty regarding today's gospel: It is about the parable of a king who gave a wedding feast for his son. The king's words do not seem to be well respected by people, so he killed them all, and calls all other people on the street, bad and good alike, for the banquet.

But when he saw those who have come with no proper wedding garment, very strange, or almost weird, is his reaction as says to his servants:

“Bind his hands and feet and cast him into the darkness outside [...].”

More perplex is the fact that Jesus tells this story to speak about the Kingdom of heaven. For we don't know how and where to see the connection between the Kingdom of heaven and this king who is full of caprice and hot temper. Some people might say, "well, this is just a mere metaphor, it is not wise to accept the story that seriously, except its gist and essence." That is, for them, what is more important is the conclusion or the lesson of the story, as Jesus says in the end, "Many are invited, but few are chosen."

This is the reasonable explanation. In fact, it is *very reasonable*, enough to make us think that, as long as we understand what the metaphor tries to say, it is not so important to know what is happening, and what is the dynamic therein. Here, let us ask ourselves, is that true? Is it possible to understand truthfully *what* the story talks about without knowing *how* it is recounted? Before answering this question, let us consider the first reading of today, which is from the Book of Ezekiel. When we compare this to the king's story, we would surely have a comfortable feeling, from the relatively familiar words and images that are proposed therein. For example, we hear the Lord saying:

"I will give you a new heart and place a new spirit within you [...]"  
"you shall be my people, and I will be your God."

Here, such personal and interior words as "heart" and "spirit" give us the feeling that we shall never be abandoned despite all our deficiency. For God is so merciful and powerful that He can give us the new heart and spirit within our stubborn existence. Thus we, though sinners, shall be His people in the loving relationship with the Lord.

This is, no doubt, a great contrast with the eccentric image of the king that Jesus mentions. However, when we go deeper into the metaphor of the heart and spirit in the Book of Ezekiel, we can see that things are not that simple. That is, just because we are accustomed to the beautiful words of metaphor, that does not mean that we are understanding correctly what they are referring to. Rather, the simple understanding of metaphor can be the very obstacle to *feeling* its essence.

For example, how do we understand the expression of "giving the new heart or new spirit"? The beautiful words such as these nowadays have become as common as they are exhaustively being used in the copies of advertisement, TV commercials, or, even in the political propaganda. But, if we see only the word, "heart", it is not just about the source of emotion, or the poetical cliché for the tenderness of love. Rather, to appreciate what the expression means, we have to, first of all, feel how the real heart is pumping, even now, inside our body.

We don't have to be the cardiologist to feel the lively energy of the physical heart that pumps itself every second in order to send the blood to the whole part of the body. Before the word "heart" is used in the commonplace and soft context, the real heart is just there, full of blood and energy, to sustain the person as he or she lives on.

The same thing can be said about the spirit. Rather than being the ambiguous substance, which is different from the body, the spirit, *ruach* in Hebrew, basically means the wind. This wind can be as strong as the storms in the middle of the sea, or it can be as soft as the whisper in your ears. But the wind affects our whole being by constantly blowing in order to change our mind.

So, what I want to say is this: When the Lord gives us the new heart and new spirit, it is not like giving a fancy gift, as saying, "it's done. Now it's yours, not mine." No, this new heart, not the stony heart, is not of the recyclable kind, but always connected with God's presence here and now.

Let us, now, return to the parable of the wedding banquet. This story, we may say, is a metaphor as a whole, or better, the metaphor of metaphor. For it is not about the ideal state which will be allowed to those who are subject to the caprice of the king. No. Rather, it is about the liveliness of the Kingdom of God. That is, it talks about, let us say, the *living possibility*, in which everyone is constantly invited to participate *fully* in the eternal banquet of Our Lord.

Yet, that is not the *end* of the story. In fact, it is open-ended, as all good metaphors are. It makes us think and discern, instead of taking it for granted that we are already called by God. Jesus says, "Many are invited, but few are chosen." It is the open conclusion full of God's potential. So, we can understand the story as a serious, yet gentle, reminder for us to discern where we are and what we are doing, here and now.