**The ‘Wedding Garment’**

*Fr Louis Fowóyò̩*

My group and myself came back from the holy land, twenty-four hours before the beginning of the present war in Gaza. The memory of places like Nazareth, Jerusalem, Jericho, Haifa, Tiberias, Red Sea, the City of David, Mountain of Temptation, Kidron Valley, Bethlehem, and others like Tel Aviv which happens to be our point of entry and departure remain very fresh in my mind.

* It is my second time of visiting Holy Land. Before we left, I was talking with a friend about how inauspicious my experience when I went to obtain my visa, but the journey became more profitable than I expected.
* One of our members who has been there, prayed that we get a guide whom they had when she went. And that was exactly what happened to us. The guide was not just from there, but also a Catholic whose intention for people is not just to be tourists but pilgrims in the Holy Land.
* My experience this time, has no doubt enriched my faith and history. The Bible has become more of a dynamic living document to me than before.
* I know that from the time of the Old Testament until now, there has always being war and counter war in the Holy Land. I cannot understand why, a culture so rich in tradition and a race chosen and highly favored will allow themselves to be controlled and manipulated by the forces of evil.
* This only proof to me that the birth of Christ in such a culture and among such a people is not a mistake if it is to correct and bring us back to God.
* The story of the man without a wedding garment in the Gospel today, reminds us of how we nonchalantly treat God and the things that are sacred.

Gospel: Matthew 22:1-14; for the Jews, just like in most cultures in the world, wedding is an important event in their life. To be invited for one is to be considered special for it is a sacred and joyous thing.

* In the case of a royal wedding, like in the Gospel of today, two things should not be taken for granted. They are: to honor the invitation and to be in a wedding garment.
* For those invited not to come was a big slight on the face of the king and that is why he requested that everyone should be invited.
* Also, at that time, for kings and wealthy men, they had wardrobes filled with fancy garment as a symbol of their wealth and glory. So, for their guest to wear from these wardrobes filled with fancy garments is a sign that one is shielded with rich wealth and glory. (Genesis 45:22, Judges 14:12, 2Kings 5:22, 2Kings 10:22, Esther 6:8 and 8:15).
* Not to wear this robe will be a great insult to the king. This is the reason why the man was sent out from the wedding feast. This will also not be a surprise to the man because he willfully refused to conform to the socio-cultural norm. He wanted to do it his way and he got what he deserved.
* No matter how clean we are, we cannot make ourselves cleaner than the robe of righteousness. To insist on covering our shame ourselves is to be clad in ‘filthy rags’ (Isaiah 64:6).
* God always provide a covering for our sins. In order to do this, he sacrificed a life (Genesis 3:7,21).
* Just as the king provided wedding garments for his guests, God provides salvation for mankind. Our wedding garment is the righteousness of Christ, and unless we have it, we will not be allowed into the Wedding Feast of His dear Son.
* If one does not care like the man in the Gospel, then there will be no other way out than to be thrown out of the banquet hall. The wedding garments are a sign of grace, freely given and received, and wearing it is a sign of respect for the king and for his son, the bridegroom.

1st Reading: Isaiah 25:6-10a; the prophet recalls the meal prepared by the Holy One for His people. It is the meal we are invited to participate in at the wedding.

* It is a meal that ratified the covenant between God and the people who have been freed from slavery. This is a meal that marked a transition from death (slavery) to life (freedom) for the people.
* The people remain the treasured possession of God and as such they are His chosen race and a royal priesthood. The meal is therefore a means in which God who has defeated the enemy makes the people to partake in the ritual feast.
* This meal is important, because the people suddenly literally see their deplorable condition and how God is cleaning them up. It is like God looking into their eyes, cleaning their dirty faced children, the broken men and the care-worn women.
* God is taking away our grief and disgrace in order to make us joyful again.
* This is His promise: “The Lord God will wipe away the tears from every face; the reproach of His people He will remove from the whole earth; for the LORD has spoken. On that day it will be said: "Behold our God, to whom we looked to save us! This is the LORD for whom we looked; let us rejoice and be glad that he has saved us!" For the hand of the Lord will rest on this mountain.”