

HOMILY FOR ALL SOULS' DAY

St. John's Elora

Let us pray.

MAY only God's word be spoken, and only God's word be heard. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, God's living Word. *Amen.*

For those of you who were at the parish retreat a few weeks ago, Archbishop Colin spoke to us about the gospel of *John*. And about the meals that are focal points throughout the gospel of *John*.

A late 20th century well known Roman Catholic Biblical scholar, named Raymond Brown, made the point that in each of the gospels after Jesus is baptized, after he goes into the wilderness, after he comes back and begins to call his disciples, he does some-thing. And Fr. Brown argued that something Jesus did was a key to understanding each whole gospel.

For example, in the gospel of *Mark*, allegedly the oldest of the gospels, after Jesus is baptized, goes into the wilderness, and calls some disciples, he heals a sick person. Then he goes on to the house of one of the disciples he just called, Simon Peter, and heals his mother-in-law. And then people start to come to that home to be healed in turn.

In the gospel of *John* from which today's reading was taken (*John* 14:1-9), right after Jesus is baptized, is tempted in the wilderness, and calls some disciples, he goes to a wedding with his mother. And at that wedding feast the wine runs out. Since wedding feasts in those days were lengthy events that was a catastrophic event. Rather than talk about that one wedding in particular, I want to first begin by saying a little something about what a wedding feast was for some Jewish people in ancient Israel at the time of Jesus .

A wedding was really a four-part production. The first part was the **pledging** of the couple. Basically, the father of the bride and the father of the groom got together and arranged a marriage. Of course, the point of arranged marriages, especially in ancient times, was to give advantage to the offspring of any wedding so that property wouldn't be lost. This is different from western tradition. The father of the groom gave a dowry, called a *mohar*, to the father of the bride. The point of this was compensation. Since at some future point, a daughter of that house would be leaving the bridal home. She would be coming over to work in the house of the groom's family, Thus, compensation was owed to the bride's father for the future loss of help. At that point the marriage deal was sealed. That pledge was step one.

The second step was the **etrothal**. That happened when the girl came of age and was capable of being married and having a family. It took place with a brief ritual, The groom offered the bride a chalice of wine. If she took it and drank it, the wedding deal was sealed. They were married but they still did live together quite yet. At this point in time, the bridegroom promised the bride and her family, "I am now going back to my father's house.

And when I get to my father's house I am going to prepare a place for you to live there. And then I will come and to get you and to bring you there – so that where I am there you may also be.”

Step 3 was the retrieval of the bride by the groom. He would go to the bride’s home and to lead her back to a wedding feast in the house of his father. The feast not like our weddings which might be an afternoon or more. In those days, they might last three or four, maybe even five days. Some even maybe went for a week.

After the wedding feast took place, the fourth and last step in the process was the groom taking the bride from the feast to the place that he had prepared for them to live together.

Sound familiar at all? Today’s gospel reports the Lord’s final speech at the Last Supper. When you think about the gospel we heard this morning, it speaks of a meal where Jesus gives his disciples a cup to drink, where he tells them that he is going to be leaving them, and that he will come again to bring them to a place he will prepare for them because in his Father's house are many mansions or many rooms.

This is one of the most popular passages you will hear at funerals. Some people understand this passage as Jesus -- remember he's the boy born in a barn because there was no room in the inn – in a role reversal saying,” I'm now the desk clerk in the biggest inn ever that my Dad owns and I'm going to make a place for you there.” That is one understanding.

But perhaps, Jesus chooses words echoing the groom’s wedding promise to the bride because it is a promise of infinite love. It is a promise of abiding care, and it is a promise for a lifetime and more. When we hear these words from today's gospel and remember the groom’s pledge of love to a bride are we to think that Jesus, the groom, is making a wedding promise to his followers, and to his disciples as the Bride of Christ – how we sometimes refer to the church? Is it also a promise of a feast to come? A wedding feast of the Lamb foretold in *Revelations* chapter 19: 7-10?

At the heart of our worship, at the heart of what we do most often on Sundays and on special days, is the celebration of the Eucharist -- a rehearsal for that promised wedding feast to come? A feast where all-enveloping love will embrace each and every one of us?

Now, before finishing, I need to say something to connect these wedding thoughts our worship today – which is All Souls Day.

All Souls Day like All Saints Day started somewhere between 900 and 1000 years ago. All Souls day is thought to started in a Benedictine monastery where the brothers in the community remembered those brothers who had. gone before them. Quite quickly, it became a widespread Christian feast. November the first was All Saints’ Day when the apostles, martyrs ,and those people whose lives were exemplary meant their images might ended up as stained-glass models or be celebrated in some other way. On the next day All Souls Day Christians remember everyone else . We remembered everyone in our individual lives, perhaps the parents who raised us, the fellowship

family of relatives whose love surrounded us, the teachers who taught us, friends that we had, associates and colleagues – all the people who mattered to us in our lives. We even remember them remember those billions and billions of people who were here before us early.

At one time, it was thought that the Saints who were so good and at death were immediately given access to the throne of God and were in God's presence instantly. The rest of us, who weren't quite so heroically good, did not gain have quite the same quick access. Thus, early on, the Church came up with the doctrine of purgatory. Purgatory was the place where the souls of the erring faithful went before they were good enough yet to be in the presence of God. There they underwent some kinds of training.

In the Reformation age, that idea lost most of its credibility. Indeed, in our own Anglican tradition the idea was also set aside for not being terribly scriptural. But in typical Anglican compromising fashion, reluctance to depart entirely from historic catholic thinking, resulted in traces of purgatory in some prayers in the Burial Office in Archbishop Thomas Cranmer's *Book of Common Prayer*. He includes the idea that we continue to be perfected in death just as we are slowly being perfected across our lifetimes.

On this All Souls' Day, we seek to remember those who have gone before us those for whom we give thanks. It is an opportunity to set aside grieving any loss and to give thanks for the gifts of all those who have walked with us and have traveled with us for parts of our individual journeys. Eucharist – thanksgiving – foreshadows the reunion to come that Jesus promised to followers. In closing, let us pray together using Cranmer's own words:

ALMIGHTY God, the God of the spirits of all flesh : Multiply, we beseech thee, to those who rest in Jesus, the manifold blessings of thy love, that the good work which thou didst begin in them may be perfected unto the day of Jesus Christ. And of thy mercy, O heavenly Father, grant that we, who now serve thee here on earth, may at the last, together with them, be partakers of the inheritance of the Saints in light ; for the sake of the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. *Amen.*