



They were not worthy because they did not believe. They did not have faith. For if they believed that the wedding feast was important, they would have been there. They would have come and received what the king was offering. Think of the 4<sup>th</sup> part of the Sacrament of the Altar from the Small Catechism: *Who receives this Sacrament worthily?* “Fasting and bodily preparation are certainly fine outward training. But that person is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words: ‘Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.’ But anyone who does not believe these words or doubts them is unworthy and unprepared, for the words, ‘for you’ require all hearts to believe.”

What qualifies someone of worthiness is not anything of themselves, but whether or not they trust God’s Word, trust His call, trust His invitation with the faith that God Himself gives. When we believe God’s Word we will respond according to it. We will joyfully come to the feast we have been invited to. To drive the point home again, every Sunday is a wedding feast. We the Church, the bride of Christ, come to receive our Bridegroom who comes to us in the Word and in His very body and blood under the bread and wine in the Sacrament. There’s part 1: being worthy.

Now is this mere coming and receiving all that is required? Is faith in the goodness of the invitation all that’s necessary? No! Check out what happens when the king sends his servants to, **“Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you can find” (Mt 22:9)**. Those servants **“gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests. But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there was a man who had no wedding garment. And he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless.” (Mt 22:10-12)**.

It was not good enough just to be in attendance. It was not good enough just to accept the invitation to the feast. The guy left speechless wasn’t **“dressed for action”** as Jesus teaches about those **“waiting for their master to come home to the wedding feast”** in **Luke 12:35**. What does this wedding garment look like? I think St. Augustine was on the right track when he preached on this text over a millennium and a half ago saying, “The garment that is required is in the heart, not on the body, for if it had been put on externally, it could not have been concealed even from the servants.” In other words, the king would have scolded *his servants* for not keeping out the riff raff, not the man who was clothed improperly! Augustine continues, “But what is the wedding garment that must be put on? We learn it from these words [of **Psalm 132:9**]: **‘May your priests be clothed with righteousness.’** It is of the garment of righteousness that the apostle [Paul] speaks when he says [in **2 Cor 5:3**], **‘Because when we are clothed, we are not found naked’.**”<sup>1</sup>

True faith not only believes in Jesus, but also wears HIS garments by faith. Side note, this weekend was not the best of weekends for our families to come in for my daughter’s Baptism. First, our Lord never commands us to baptize when it’s convenient. He commands us to baptize, and just like all His other commandments, we should not put them off, just like we shouldn’t put off His invitation to the wedding feast! But in addition, today’s Gospel reading is the perfectly convenient time to have a Baptism. Paul writes in **Galatians 3:27**, **“As many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.”** So it is Christ who *is* our wedding garment. It is by faith in Christ that His garment makes us worthy! One is worthy who believes Christ’s Word, but there’s more to the promise. Not only are our sins forgiven, but by faith we put on the righteousness of Christ. That’s how, as St. Augustine preached the Psalm, we are clothed with righteousness. So the baptized Christian wears Jesus about them all their lifelong. If we actually believed this all the time, we would live our lives according to this truth, knowing we are representing – more than that, wearing – Christ in our various vocations all the time.

The Gospel, the Good News for you, is that Christ adorns us with Himself. Faith believes this. This is why we can sing as we will in the first Distribution hymn, “Soul, adorn myself with gladness”! Apart from faith in Christ for the forgiveness of sins and apart from faith that Christ’s righteousness adorns us, we would be **“[bound] up hand and foot and cast (sic him) into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Mt 22:13)** just like the man in the text. But by faith in Jesus Christ, the soul is adorned with Christ’s righteousness, the forgiveness of sins, eternal life – all the things that constitute true joy. The “wedding garment” is worn by faith!

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<sup>1</sup> *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, Matthew 22:1-14, p. 147.

Now, I do want to take a few moments to make a parallel application of this garment wearing in sanctification terms. While not wearing the “wedding garment” by faith would condemn us to hell, for as **Mark 16:16** teaches, **“whoever does not believe will be condemned”**, this sanctification application is not the direct meaning of the text nor will it condemn us if we don’t do it. This holiness of Christian living application is in regards to how we dress for Church. It is an honorable thing that this congregation has a reputation of “dressing up” for worship. While before God wearing a suitcoat if you’re a man or a nice dress if you’re a woman will not merit you any worth – we already discussed this – only faith does that, how we dress for Church does make a great confession to the world and is good for us. It is an honorable tradition that our Ushers and Elders wear suitcoats when they serve. Remember who it is that we are serving: it is Christ our King. This is not just some abstract, theological truth. We confess that Jesus Christ our King is truly present in His Word and truly present in His body and blood in the Sacrament. It is appropriate to give our Lord the honor due Him, and one way we can do that is to “dress the part” so to speak; to dress our best for our King. What we wear will instruct us how to think about what is happening in the Divine Service. But it also is a wonderful confession to our neighbors who see us leaving our house on Sunday morning garbed not in sports’ or leisurely apparel, but clothing fit for being in the presence of a king. Does this appease God’s wrath towards sin? Absolutely not. Only Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross did that. But it does sure confess that we believe the King is here. And we want to look our best for Him, just as a woman makes herself look pretty before going on a date. We, the Church, are the King’s bride. And Jesus has invited us to the feast. He has made you worthy. He has adorned you with His garments. So let’s eat, for Jesus’ sake and in Jesus’ name, Amen.