

# THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

## Wedding Garment

The Wedding Banquet is an important symbol of the coming of the Messiah. Jesus himself seems to have felt that his time with his disciples was nuptial in character, and I think this deserves our attention.

### Honeymoon

The quality of joy that belongs to a newly-married couple is very specific. There should be a most incarnate sense of having found harbour, having come home: of the security of the promises, the sharing of the present and the future, the enjoyment of one another's presence in peace and freedom. The gift of active, thoughtful kindness is laden with promise for the future, as is the excitement of a new way of life, a new home. A pity that our way of drifting into marriage seems to necessitate a shacking-up process with no innocence or ceremony, followed by a late wedding often attended by the children! We need to rediscover the character of Jesus' life with his disciples: they sensed a new way of life in his presence, a way which called them to leave the past behind, and to set out with him like Abraham, seeking the land of promise. Clearly there must have been nothing less than love between Jesus and them, and this love was something which overwhelmed all their previous plans, and put into the melting-pot all their previous religion. It was a hugely powerful mix of challenge and attraction; they did not seem to know any limits in their response to him. That is how I should like to see marriages begin. Risky? O yes. Consciously so.

### What About Us?

Now: how nuptial do *you* feel about your faith? There's a frightening bit in the Apocalypse where Jesus says to the Church of Ephesus: *I have this complaint to make: you have less love now than you formerly did. Think where you were before you fell; repent, and be as you were at first; for if you do not repent, I shall come to you and take your lamp-stand from its place.* This threatening oracle from the glorified Lord might be read in conjunction with today's story of the man who came in without his wedding-garment. When I was young, I thought he was probably a poor man who had no clothes that deserved to be worn at a wedding. But that isn't Jesus' meaning. The garment of readiness for grace and joy is in the wardrobe of the poorest. This man has no wedding-garment because *he hasn't bothered to*

*put it on*; this means that he doesn't honour the King's invitation as it deserves. He is keen to accept the invitation, but not ready to respond in kind; he comes to a royal banquet, determined to eat it like a beggar. He does nobody any honour, and does not value his invitation to the feast.

### Bad And Good Alike

The King invites twice. On the first occasion people respond with indifference, and then with violent cruelty. The King replies with royal anger, "burning their town". The second invitation, to the poor and crippled, is greeted with acceptance, but (by one man) only partially; the King again responds with anger, "throwing him into the darkness outside". It's clear that the first invitation was sent to Israel, who responded both with indifference, and with the persecution of the prophets and of Christ (the Romans destroyed Jerusalem by fire). The second invitation is issued to the Church, including the Gentiles: but its direction "to bad and good alike" must not be taken to mean that any old behaviour is acceptable within the Church.

### Stop Sulking - Look Up!

No-one can *earn* God's favour; but when God invites us to his wedding-feast, we must respond generously, as befits the host, and dress ourselves accordingly. Your faith has the power (if you take the risk of hoping in it) to fill you with joy and generosity to God, to make you into a wedding-guest. Is there a carnation in your lapel, any confetti in your pocket? Are you carrying a worthy gift? Believe God's promises, and your life may be expected to light up and shine! But beware: if his promises mean little to you, you may go on living a funeral existence, afflicted with meanness, dressed in the robes of indifference and despair, expecting only the darkness, tears, and gnashing teeth of a graceless life. Those you can easily inherit instead. Think again! The Gospel is a gift that demands that we dress in the bright robes of our salvation.  
*Fr Philip*