

AUGUST 21 2025 FATHER PETER JAE CHOI

When I was newly ordained as a priest I was sent to St. Rose of Lima parish in Scarborough. The church had finished the major renovation just one year prior to my arrival. It was beautifully renovated, but with lots of windows and no air conditioning in the Church, I found it too hot to pray in the church during the summer months. So I would go to the adoration chapel to have my quiet moment of prayer and reflection. It was dark, quiet, and cool, just the way I liked it. When I sat in the chapel I noticed the wall behind me, and a blue coloured glass which was more of a wall than a window. Then one day the artist who designed the stained glass in the adoration chapel called the parish, asking if she could bring in a team of people to photograph the stained glass. We, of course, said yes. As the team of people came in setting up lights in many places, I was wondering what they were trying to photograph. After all it was just a dark blue shaded glass wall. Lo and behold, when they were finished with setting up all the lights I realized that the glass wall wasn't just a dark blue glass as I always thought. It was actually a beautiful depiction of creation! The sun, sky, mountains, valleys and running streams! It was unmistakably a beautiful artistic rendition of creation! Stained glass windows are like that, a beauty that can only be appreciated from the inside. Only when the light shines through the stained glass window, does all the colours and the image that was hidden in plain sight come to life!

Back in 1831, when the famous novelist Victor Hugh wrote the Hunchback of Notre-Dame, his novel featured the Notre-Dame Cathedral and depicted its neglect and decay. The novel highlighted the cathedral's architectural significance, which sparked public interest in its preservation, leading the way to the Cathedral's restoration to its former beauty. After the French revolution, many people abandoned their faith in France and lost sight of the beauty that was hidden in plain sight. Fortunately or unfortunately, it took a novelist to spark interest in hidden gems which paved the way for many Catholics to return to faith.

In a way, that is what Pope Pius the 10th was trying to do with his papacy. His motto was to “restore all things in Christ!” He worked very hard to bring reform to the Church including, the liturgy and sacred music, biblical studies, seminary training, revision of the code of Canon Law, and lowering the age requirement of the reception of the First Holy Communion from 12 years to 7 years. He also taught weekly catechism classes, and preached homilies every Sunday in San Damaso courtyard in the Vatican, inviting people to attend.

In today’s gospel, the parable of the Wedding Banquet, the King invited guests to attend the royal banquet. And when the invited guests refused, he quickly told the servants to invite everyone in the street to come to the banquet. The call was universal, everyone! Invitation to the wedding banquet was really an invitation to the Kingdom of Heaven. Many people who came to the banquet enjoyed the feast, whether they deserved it or not. But notice how the one person who didn’t come wearing the wedding garment was punished. The wedding garment represented faith and obedience to God’s will.

Some of the invited guests turned down the invitation and refused to attend the banquet because they were too busy with their farm or their business. Talking about priorities here. We all know that it takes months of preparation to plan a wedding and the wedding reception. We make the list of the invited guests. We have to inform the banquet hall how many people will be attending and make the seating chart. Refusing to attend or last minute cancelling is not only being inconsiderate and rude, but also disrespectful. We don’t tend to forget these kinds of people, and I am sure they will be blacklisted and will never be invited again. Important family functions or events in the life of friends are a priority and principle. In many cases people take time off from work and travel overseas to be present at their family or friend’s wedding. Being there for each other is our way of saying, “you matter, you are important to

me, I care about you, and I love you.” Are we thinking this or saying this to God with our actions and with our everyday life?

Just like today’s parable, we don’t enter the Kingdom of God based on our merits. The only reason we end up in the Kingdom of God is because, just like the King who invited everyone on the street who did not have the right to attend, we enter at the mercy of God’s generosity. I remember in one of Bishop Fulton Sheen’s homily, that there’s going to be three surprises in heaven. First, the people we expected to see in heaven aren’t there. Second, the people we didn’t expect to see are there. And third, we will be surprised that we are there. In the same way, we don’t deserve heaven, but it is a free gift. But in fact, it is not free because Jesus paid for it with His life! Jesus chose us. He made us His priority. He made seeking us and saving us His Mission.

I once heard a story of a young child who received a large inheritance. He spent it all building a theme park in his house. He regretted it once he grew up, because his priorities had changed. Many of us make the mistake of making wrong choices. Choosing career and wealth over relationships, or more precisely by sacrificing relationships. During the course of our lives our priorities will change many times. Often when we travel near the end of the road, then and only then do we come to realize we can’t bring anything with us when we die. The only thing that will carry us to heaven is God’s love and mercy. Let’s make loving God and building our relationship with God our priority.