Come to the Feast!

Homily by

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Synod 2026

During my college seminary days in the small town of Perryville Missouri, due to political turmoil and religious persecution halfway around the world, it happened that a group of seminarians came to study and live with us, all the way from Ethiopia. You can imagine what that experience must have been like for them coming to place where the culture, history, language, and skin color were totally different from their homeland. Even with the challenges and pains of culture shock and inculturation, they brought with them a depth of culture, camaraderie, language, and faith that filled our seminary with joy.

We welcomed them into our world and they invited us into theirs. Kenna Desta, Adisu Haile, Gabre Mirium Yesu Yebo, Tafese Tucho, Chimeroo Oluna, and Hagos Weldegorgious.

In our time together I found developing within me a desire to visit Ethiopia, to get to know their families and the wonders of their culture, food and land.

After years together, one of the band of Ethiopian brothers, Kenna, decided to leave the seminary and yet was hoping to stay in the States until he finished his graduate studies. Knowing my parents, he asked if I could approach them with the request of being able to live with them in California for 6 months until he could get his feet on the ground.

Six years later when he married, he moved out of my parent's house, yet grafted into our family, becoming a beloved "adopted" child and brother.

As you can imagine, my desire to go to Ethiopia only grew…and though many years have passed I still hunger to visit this magical land that produced such lovely people…

Just two years ago, I finally got my chance to visit Ethiopia, but not where or how I thought it was going to happen.

It turns out that I was asked by my niece, Annie, to be the celebrant for her wedding. Her fiancé, John, is First Generation, born here in the US from a huge Ethiopian family and Community that lives in Southern California.

From the first moment of the actual wedding, in Los Angeles, to the end of the reception, I was somehow transported to Ethiopia. The wedding banquet was held in a huge room so as to seat the 600+ invited guests that were invited. Mostly all Ethiopians. The tables were set with

magnificent floral arrangement and special homeland beverages. The rich aroma of foods being prepared wafted through the hall as Ethiopian music filled the spaces and guests by the hundreds arrived all dressed in their best Ethiopian traditional dresses and suits.

When the special moment arrived, in came the bride and groom, dressed as a king and queen accompanied by shouts of joy and applause that thundered through the space.

I have never seen such an abundance of food at a wedding in all my life. And it was mouthwatering delicious! After speeches and many beautiful words were spoken, many in Amharic, the king and queen danced and then invited all to dance with them in a big circle of life. It did not matter that some of us had never learned Ethiopean dance moves. We were made to feel welcomed (do some dance moves). Joy, laughter and love just hovered in the air, flowing between us, entering into us and making us all connected and part of one body.

All belonged and somehow, I found myself at home in Ethiopia.

At the end of the evening, all the elders came forward and were seated, while the newlyweds, Annie and John, knelt before each one to receive their blessing.

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The readings today brought this wedding feast to mind. Perhaps you have been invited and participated in a spectacular wedding that left you wondering,

"What land did I just visit?"

Try and recall where and when that took place.

Perhaps it was a destination wedding?

Recall the images and feelings you experienced.

In the gospel reading from Matthew these words are spoken:

The kingdom of heaven may be likened to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son. He dispatched his servants to summon the invited guest to the feast...tell those invited,

"Behold, I have prepared my banquet,

my calves and fattened cattle are killed,

and everything is ready; come to the feast."

In our first reading we hear from the prophet Isaiah:

On this mountain the Lord of host will provide for all peoples

A feast of rich food and choice wines,

Juicy, rich food and pure, choice wines.

On this mountain he will destroy

The veil that veils all peoples,

The web that is woven over all nation:

He will destroy death forever.

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!

These words from Isaiah were spoken to a people living during a period of deep fear and insecurity, of devastation caused by war, of forced migration and displacement. The stability of the world, the relationship to the land, the political and religious foundations were coming undone.

When I think of the context of when this word was spoken, I imagine that many of us can relate:

The signs of Climate Change are all around

The wars in Ukraine, Gaza and now Iran have been devastating, leading many to fear that yet another worldwide conflict is inevitable.

Our own democracy and many others around the world are experiencing a rise in totalitarianism. Corruptions, greed and the love of power are disintegrating foundations.

Institutional racism, and the violence and marginalization of immigrants, of the LGBTQ+ community, and the unhoused, reveals the deep sins and wounds of our inner life as a country.

The fear of AI turning on us as humans and ending our existence is buzzing like hornets in our ears.

Like all of you, I found it necessary to honor those 2,977 killed in the attacks of 9-11. We learned that more than 9,000 others have died due to toxic exposure connected to those attacks...The consequent War on Terror that was released in response to 9/11 has taken the lives of 4.5 million people.

This afternoon many of us will be going on a pilgrimage to honor George Floyd, murdered by a police office and Rene Good and Alex Preti murdered by ICE officers. Our country's addiction to weapons and commitment to the violence use of force to "solve" problems hit here at home as well.

These are perhaps just some of our collective fears and burdens.

How many of us carry fears and anxieties on a very personal or familia level?

As we take a good hard look at these realities, one could be overwhelmed by fear and even tempted to resign oneself to the inevitable. One of my students said that they believed that God is indifferent to our plight! So many young people are teetering on the edge of despair.

And yet the message of old to the peoples of Israel from Isaiah and Jesus, is one of hope. God is **deeply** concerned about us as well as the sacred world of creation that sustains us.

Most recently I have been inspired to hope with a clear path forward though the wisdom of **Fr. Greg Boyle** and all those who are a part of **HomeBoy Industries.** (Fr. Greg is a Jesuit who has been ministering for over 40 years to those who have been caught up in gang life.)

One could well be tempted to believe that many of our social problems are caused by evil people doing evil deeds. In his book, <u>Cherished Belonging,</u> has been convinced that

1) Everyone is unshakably good (no exceptions)

and

2) We belong to each other (no exceptions).

He frames the plight of the those caught up in gang life as being not one of bad people doing bad things, but rather by people, who have been traumatized, living with mental anguish, underlying despair, acting out of their woundedness.

He says,

"At Homeboy Industries, we're always trying to pry the criminal justice system away from violence and punishment, over policing and mass incarceration, and bend it toward healing, repair, and restoration.

Heal wounds rather than punish them.

Our tendency, to date, as a society, is to medicalize and criminalize unlivable lives.

We've nearly outlawed the hopeless.

This punishment system needs to be dismantled.

We are all seeking a more powerful narrative of belonging...Rather than the tribalism that excludes and punishes, the new narrative proposes a village that cherishes."

After so many years in the trenches of ministry he has come to these beliefs:

1. God is in the loving.
2. God IS inclusion.
3. Demonizing is always untruth.

4. We belong to each other.
5. Separation is an illusion.
6. Tenderness is the highest form of spiritual maturity.
7. “Kindness is the only non-delusional response to everything” (George Saunders).
8. Love your neighbor as you love your child.
9. We are all unshakable good.
10. A community of cherished belonging is God’s dream come true.

He goes on to say,

(When)We align the compass of our hearts with the energy of this wild God, we find the God of intimate welcome, generous hospitality. I’ve immersed myself lately in women mystics, such as ***Teresa of Avila***, ***Dame Julian of Norwich***, and ***Mechthild of Magdeburg***, to name just three.

“Love begets love,” Teresa writes.

Mystics found an anchor within, born of a love that can’t be agitated.

These women found a Christ consciousness and oneness in their rendezvous with the God of love.

It drew them to see differently.

They saw the world as God’s body.

It becomes an all-embracing cherishing that turns outward to the world.

These women welcomed the tenderness of God, then vigorously poured that out in love."

This same Spirit of God is presently living with us and within us and invites us to taste the first fruits of this banquet even here and now. There will be an ultimate feast, a time when death will be destroyed and all tears will be wiped from our eyes.

In the meantime, let us pour out our lives in love!

We don't have to look far….right here in Minnesota, here in in Eden Prairie… for great examples of how to generously give of oneself for others.

I saw first had how people in the Charis Community came together along with thousands of others to protect and stand in active resistance to ICE.

Thomas Friedman praised how Minnesotans came together to protect and defend their neighbors during the federal immigration (ICE) operations.

He coined the term, "neighboring" -- looking out for one another, *"Minnesotans are winter people, Don't come for winter people in winter. They're not afraid of the cold. Just the opposite.*

The weather has forged a unique Minnesota neighborliness...Just a basic human impulse to look out for your neighbors and, yes, dig their cars out of the snow on Monday because you know they will do the same for you on Wednesday.

I am my neighbor's keeper, whoever he or she is, however he or she got here."

Throughout our lives and hopefully through life in our Beloved Ecumenical Catholic Communion, we have tasted of the wedding feast of God's making.

What are the juicy, rich foods and pure choice wines that we have savored?

Love

Compassion

Mercy

Joy

Peace

Patience

Kindness

Goodness

Faithfulness

Gentleness,

Self-control

Forgiveness

Empathy

Solidarity

Hospitality

Humility

Acceptance

Because we have tasted and caught a glimpse of this magnificent banquet, *we are now called to be God's messengers.*

We are the servants that God has dispatched to summon the invited guests to the feast.

Come to the feast!

All are invited!

Really!!!

The good and the bad?

The Whole and the Wounded?

Yes! Come to the Feast!

Even those who have acted out of their woundedness!?

Yes! Come to the Feast!

Even those in prison!?

Yes! Come to the Feast!

Even those who are addicts!?

Yes! Come to the Feast!

Even those who are living on the streets!?

Yes! Come to the Feast!

(Without guns and handcuffs) Even ICE agents!?

Yes! Come to the Feast!

Even immigrants without papers?

Yes! Come to the Feast!

Even MAGA folks?

Yes! Come to the Feast!

Even Social Democrats!

Yes! Come to the Feast!

(Think and say aloud who you would not want to come to the Feast)

(When I raise my inviting hand say...)

Yes! Come to the Feast

All are welcome!

As we enter the Banquet Hall and begin to partake of the feast,

Our hearts and minds become transformed.

We taste love and want to give love.

We are forgiven and we want to forgive.

We taste compassion and hunger to give compassion.....

And so it is!

We become what we eat!

We become what we live!