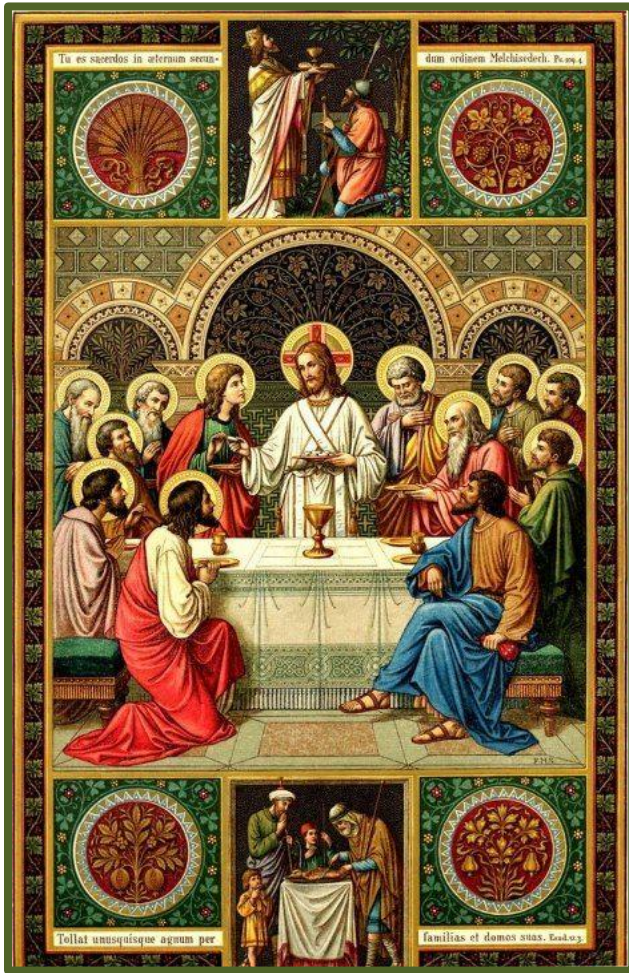




In this week's Gospel, Jesus likens the kingdom of heaven to a king who gave a magnificent wedding feast for his son (Mt 22:1-14). The king prepares a fabulous feast and sends out invitations, but the invited guests refuse to come: "some ignored the invitation and went away, one to his farm, another to his business." As usual, Jesus' parables have many applications and levels of interpretation. St. Pope John Paul II connected this parable with our Sunday obligation to attend Mass. The fact is, every Sunday and every Day of Obligation the Lord sends us an invitation to come to the "wedding feast for his son"—the Eucharistic Feast.

In the Catechism of the Catholic Church we learn that it is a mortal sin to miss Sunday Mass unless excused for a "serious reason":

The Sunday Eucharist is the foundation and confirmation of all Christian practice. For this reason the faithful are obliged to participate in the Eucharist on days of obligation, unless excused for a serious reason (for example, illness, the care of infants) or dispensed by their own pastor. Those who deliberately fail in this obligation commit a grave sin. (CCC #2181)

Yes, it is a grave sin to miss Mass on Sunday, but why? Obviously, I cannot give a complete theological treatise on this matter in a paragraph or two, but I can offer some fuel for thought. The bottom line is, God has made known to us

how we are to express our love for Him. It is His spoken desire that we come together as His people to worship Him, to give thanks to Him, to pray with and for one another, and to physically partake of His divine life—body, blood, soul and divinity. Jesus said, "Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood you have no life in you. ... My flesh is true food, my blood is true drink. ... With longing I have longed to eat this Passover meal with you" (John 6; Lk 25:15). This is not an optional extra! It is essential to the "new and everlasting covenant" God has established with His people. The Catechism teaches us:

"The Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life . . . it is the sublime cause of that communion in the divine life and that unity of the People of God by which the Church is kept in being. . . . It is the culmination both of God's action sanctifying the world in Christ and of the worship men offer to Christ and through him to the Father in the Holy Spirit" (CCC #1325).

Let me offer a simple explanation. Suppose Jesus walked up to you today and said, "My friend, it is my great desire to save you from your sins and let you partake of my divine Life—Eternal Life. Meet me on Sunday with my priest and my people and I will come to you, body, blood, soul, and divinity, and I will give you new Life. In coming to me in this way, you will remain in Me and I will remain in you." Now, if Jesus were to say that to you, I believe you would be there on Sunday! Furthermore, would it not be an act of gross presumption, disobedience, and downright rejection, to look Jesus in the face and say, "I understand you have established this covenant with your people and you greatly desire me to come and receive saving grace, but I do not want to come to Mass this Sunday and I'm sure you will save me just the same." Heaven forbid! The bottom line is, Jesus has spoken to us through His Church and invited us to come to His Eucharistic Feast. What a sad commentary that today, as in the parable, the King of kings has prepared a magnificent feast for us, yet "some ignore the invitation and go away, one to his farm, another to his business." May the Lord help us all to never refuse such a sublime invitation, in the end, it is literally a matter of life and death!

Your Servant in Christ,
Fr. Terry Staples