

- About two years before her death, St. Thérèse of Lisieux wrote what she called “An Act of Oblation to Merciful Love.” This was not simply a prayer but a sort of personal manifesto, a means for her to respond to the merciful love she felt coming to her from God.
- Thérèse said that she received the grace to understand how much Jesus desires to be loved, and in response she made this “Act of Oblation to Merciful Love,” expressing her desire to give herself to God fully, to be a martyr-victim of His love.
- St. Thérèse desired sainthood, but she knew that she couldn’t do it on her own! She knew that God must be her holiness, and so she wasn’t concerned to stand before the Judgment Throne with a list of good works.
- She just wanted to be saved, and she had absolute confidence that God would save her because she had united herself to Him so closely. Thus, she wrote in her Act of Oblation:

*After earth’s Exile, I hope to go and enjoy You in the Fatherland, but I do not want to lay up merits for heaven. I want to work for Your Love alone with the one purpose of pleasing You, consoling Your Sacred Heart, and saving souls who will love You eternally.*

*In the evening of this life, I shall appear before You with empty hands, for I do not ask You, Lord, to count my works. All our justice is stained in Your eyes. I wish, then, to be clothed in Your own Justice and to receive from Your Love the eternal possession of Yourself. I want no other Throne, no other Crown but You, my Beloved!*

- It’s for this reason that, when we painted our apse mural of the angels and saints surrounding the heavenly throne adoring Christ the Paschal Lamb, we painted St. Thérèse with empty, upraised hands.
- Her offering to God was not so much her good works, which were considerable, but rather her own love and desire for union with Him. St. Thérèse greatest desire was to please and console God for the sake of His glory and for the salvation of other souls.
- Thus, she undertook all of her good works as a means of consoling God and as an expression of her deep love for Him, rather than as a mercenary means of meriting Heaven.
- You see, God is not a divine accountant weighing up our spiritual debits and credits.
- He’s an omnipotent Father on Whom we rely for everything; and He’s a loving Father who wants to save us. By His suffering, death, and resurrection, Jesus has redeemed us – meaning that salvation is possible for us because of the price He paid.
- And we have access to His redemptive merits through choosing to be united to Christ, which means living in a state of grace rather than mortal sin. Yet, our Lord desires that we prove our love for Him by living lives of virtue and doing good works.
- St. Thérèse understood that her good works couldn’t save her, but she also understood that offering her good works to God as an offering was pleasing to Him.
- Our Lord is all-powerful and can cleanse our sins with His divine glance. Yet, we must desire complete union with Him if we want to be saved, for He will never deny or take away our free will. So while the work of salvation is God’s, we have to participate in it.
- And this is where we get into today’s Gospel.
- Keep in mind that today’s Gospel parable follows right upon the heels of last Sunday’s parable of the evil tenants of the vineyard, and it should be read in its light.

- In last Sunday's parable our Lord was criticizing the Jewish leaders, speaking in symbolic terms of the failure of Israel to heed God's commands and produce good fruit. Not only that, Israel's leaders beat and killed the prophets who were sent to call them back to God's ways.
- Worse yet, when our Lord sent them His Son, their long-awaited Messiah, the chief priests and leaders of the Jewish people rejected Him and handed Him over to Pilate to be crucified.
- Their pride, lack of love, and lack of fidelity led Israel to its downfall. They failed to live as God asked, and so God turned over the Kingdom of God to a people who would produce good fruit: the Gentiles, who with the faithful Jews would form the early Church.
- In today's parable Jesus again criticizes the Jewish leaders, referring to them as those who were invited to the feast, but who refused to come. Of course, as Israel's leaders, they should have been the first to recognize Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah, but their sin blinds them.
- When other servants are sent to them to call them again to the feast, some just ignored the invitation, while others laid hold of the king's servants – a symbol for the prophets – mistreating them and even killing them.
- In response to this, the king of this parable – an obvious reference to our Lord – instructs His servants to go out into the main roads to invite to the feast whomever they find – another reference to the evangelization of the Gentiles who would help form the early Church.
- Just as last Sunday I mentioned how God has expectations of us that we fulfill through fulfilling the Precepts of the Church, this parable reminds us that we must participate in the process of our salvation.
- We must want Heaven and ready ourselves for it by living lives of faith, hope, and charity, practicing the virtues, participating in the Sacraments, and living lives of prayer.
- And again, while our good deeds don't save us, they are important signs of our faith in God; they are how we become more like Christ. And this is where we turn to the conversation about the guest in the parable lacking a proper wedding garment.
- The wedding garment in today's Gospel is a symbol of our righteous deeds. But this isn't simply our works of charity. Rather, it's also about comporting ourselves according to God's will and corresponding to God's grace.
- So, while we are saved by God's grace, our Gospel this Sunday again tells us of the need to be transformed by God's grace and truly grow in virtue and holiness.
- Again, we mustn't content ourselves with just doing the bare minimum to avoid hell, but seek to merit a high place in Heaven by excelling in holiness during our earthly lives.
- We need to live our lives like Jesus if we hope to spend eternity with Him.
- While we must go to God's judgment throne with empty hands, realizing we are only saved by God's grace, we must strive to go with a wedding garment made of the faithful fabric of corresponding to His grace, illustrated by a virtuous life lived in union with God's will.
- While many are indeed invited to the heavenly wedding feast, few are chosen. Relying on God's grace, through which we can do all things, may we offer ourselves and all our good works to God in order to please Him and help save other souls.
- St. Thérèse of Lisieux, pray for us!