

How often have you heard someone say, usually a long lost relative, or a friend you haven't seen for ages, "Weddings and funerals seem to be the only time we get together." And the sense of the comment, the disappointment even, is in the idea that as relatives, as friends, we see so little of one another.

Of course, there are lots of reasons for this; distance, work, family situations. It may even be a choice, that people choose to live a long way away from others. But in general, the comment is a sincere one, we don't see enough of one another.

And one of the reasons for that is the busyness of modern life. People work long hours, mortgages and rents must be paid. Children have many extra school activities; football, rugby, gym, drama, music, hobbies, holidays and even church. Taxi driver parents are all the rage. People are busy.

Which is perhaps why, weddings and funerals are the things we tend to see people at, because they are the two things that people stop for. They are the two things that people make time for. The two things that people make sure they attend.

Weddings of course are planned and the date is set, and you are invited to come. There is usually a considerable amount of expense laid out by those hosting the party, so invitations are overall taken seriously and responded to in kind. "Yes of course we will keep the date, we would love to come."

Funerals on the other hand are not so well planned. They often come without warning and are sudden occurrences. But we attend these because we love and respect the person who has died. We want to honour them, their memory and all that they have meant to us. We attend them because we are deeply connected to them or another member of the family and we want to support and be there for those we care about.

Weddings and funerals draw us together. We attend them. And so, we see people we may not have seen for years and years and years. And it's often over the wedding breakfast, or the cup of tea and a sausage roll, that we mix and mingle and catch up with those who have come. Relationships are re-established, memories invoked, old times gone over, new relatives introduced. Old friends seen again. Hence, it is often said, "weddings and funerals seem to be the only time we get together."

In our gospel reading for today, Jesus is at a meal. A dinner in the house of a Pharisee on the Sabbath, and he is being watched closely. On the way there Jesus has noticed a sick man and healed him. Jesus questions the Pharisees about whether this is the right thing to do or not, on the Sabbath Day. **Jesus is not an easy dinner guest.**

When they all finally arrive at the hosts home for the meal, he notices that those invited pick the best places in the room to sit. He questions them about this. **Jesus is not an easy dinner guest.**

As the food is being served Jesus has a chat to the host and asks why when he is having a big lunch like this, he only asks his friends and rich neighbours, and not the others in the town. The poor and needy and the not so rich. Adding that if he did so, God might bless him. **Jesus is not an easy dinner guest.**

As the meal is under way and people are eating and drinking, he then stirs himself to tell a story about a great dinner and being invited to attend. A little like the invitation to a wedding or the respect shown in attending a funeral.

The invitations go out. But no one replies. No one says “yes of course we will keep the date, we would love to come.” Not a single positive reply is forth coming. There are excuses, yes sir. There are plenty of excuses. “I’ve just brought a beach house, I’m away for the weekend. I’m taking my new car for a drive; sorry I can’t be there.” And on they go. So instead of those intended for the invite, the invitation is thrown wide to all and sundry, that anyone may come. Anyone and everyone may come and enjoy the feast, enjoy being with each other. Enjoy the opportunity to say, “Weddings and funerals, seem to be the only time we get together.” Jesus then says, that the host of the great feast proclaims that those that turned down the invitation, will not taste any of the dinner. **Jesus is not an easy dinner quest.**

This great gospel dinner is an invitation to all, as is the great gospel dinner offered in our celebration of the Eucharist, everyone is welcome. But it’s also an invitation to an even greater gospel dinner at the end of time. “Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” When all the Saints will be gathered. From every year, every decade, every generation, every century, every age ... gathered to feast ... to eat and drink in the presence of Jesus. To be with one another. To catch up. To reconnect and enjoy one another’s company. Everyone will be there. The famous ones: Those we have heard of. Those we have read about. Those we have admired. Those we have always wanted to meet. Those we have always wanted to question ...

Those we have loved. Those who have died. Those we miss with a physical pain. Those we are lonely and long for. Those who have been our life ... in this life.

We will be together to enjoy one another’s company and say, “we don’t need to worry about weddings and funerals anymore, we can get together whenever we want.”

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Jesus is not an easy dinner guest ... but he is an incredibly generous one.

Everyone is invited to the great gospel dinner. The Eucharist. Everyone is welcome.

Everyone is invited to the greatest gospel dinner of all ... the Marriage Supper of the Lamb.

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Please RSVP with... “of course, we will save the date, we would love to come.”

Amen.