

Do you remember all the fuss when Jeremy Corbyn elected to wear a hooded anorak at a Remembrance Day service at the Cenotaph when all the other men present were wearing either uniform or smart dark coats? There was an absolute outcry at what was perceived at best a slight and at worst an outrage in wearing such casual dress on such a solemn occasion. Many saw it as a grave insult to the memories of the dead who had given their lives in service to this country. He was accused of being ‘scruffy and disrespectful’ and his attire compared to that of a former Labour Leader Michael Foot when in 1981 he chose to wear a donkey jacket also at the Cenotaph.

There are definitely occasions when there is an expected dress code and to break that code can easily earn the opprobrium and disparagement of others who see a lack of conformity or deliberate flouting of the code as a quite deliberate insult. Weddings demand a display of finery even if ladies’ hats are no longer de rigueur and the dress code for such places as Royal Ascot are strictly observed.

I’m sure all of us here have at one time or another agonised as to what we are expected to wear at certain functions or parties but whereas Jeremy Corbyn’s and Michael Foot’s choices may have been quite deliberate, I would imagine that none of us here would like to make such a spectacle of ourselves and would indeed be mortified and humiliated to do so.

And reflecting on all this I think we can understand why that casually dressed guest earned such a castigation when he came to that all- important wedding. This wasn’t the wedding of the year or even the wedding of the century but the most important wedding of all time. And here comes a guest in the equivalent of that well- worn anorak because no way is he going to dress up for this bridegroom however royal he may be. On the previous two Sundays our gospel readings have concentrated on parables told by Jesus in which he has quite deliberately targeted the religious hierarchy of the time and I think we can safely assume from today’s gospel reading that once again the subject of this criticism is that same religious hierarchy. That religious hierarchy who had no respect for Jesus and were determined that he should if, at all possible, be redacted from history. They had no wish to be at this particular wedding but felt obliged to be seen to be there but having come chose to neglect to show the necessary respect that was to be expected on such an occasion. No wonder the King who was their host was angry at such a deliberate and calculated slight and responded as he did.

So the question for all of us this morning is first of all do we accept with true gratitude that invitation to be a guest of Christ the King or do we, being quite honest, sometimes think we have better ways of spending our time and simply go through the motions of being at the party?

And the second question of course is do we come clothed in our wedding robes? In my childhood no one would have dreamed of going to church in T-shirt, jeans and trainers but would make sure they had on their Sunday best which in the case of women usually involved a hat and gloves as well as a special dress. Nowadays there is rarely such attention to what one wears to church but while we may not concern ourselves too much with the outward appearance, although just possibly we ought to be asking ourselves why not, what about the inner appearance?

Do we come clothed in the wedding robes of awe and wonder at being in the presence of our Lord? Do we come clothed in praise and thankfulness at being part of this amazing celebration of God's goodness? Do we come clothed in humility and reverence that God has stooped to embrace us within His love? Do we come clothed in love; love for our host and love for all our fellow guests? Surely even if we opt for our PJs at a Zoom or web service these are the spirit wrapped clothes we are called upon to wear to honour our Lord and God.

And back to my first question are we over the moon at being invited to such an occasion for surely each and every single act of worship should in effect be seen as a wedding feast with our Lord, the groom present with us where we can be blessed with a glimpse of God's kingdom already present here on earth. Can we ever be accused of regarding our church going more as a habit than truly a time for joyful celebration of all that God has done for us; all the blessings he pours out upon us day by day. Do we 'ascribe to the Lord the honour due to his name'? Do 'we worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness' or is it just possible that we do so in the routine of rote repeated words? And is there also an honest acknowledgement that we have been gathered from the highways and byways of sin and wrongdoing and that despite this we are called to participate in this awesome, never to be rivalled feast which is yet another reason to bow down before our Lord God with the gold of obedience and the incense of lowliness.

I would like to end with these words from our Epistle which surely are the benchmark by which we should live our lives and ensure that as far as is possible we will be wearing wedding clothes as we kneel and adore our Lord who is our most gracious host, our God, our King and our Saviour.

'Finally beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.'