

*Thursday of the 20th Week of Ordinary Time*

*Homily given by Bishop Jean-Luc Hudsyn, Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Malines-Bruxelles*

*Universa Laus international meeting, Saint-Walfroy, France, 23 August 2012*

“How did you get in here without a wedding garment?”

This question puts us in the presence of what we celebrate at every Eucharist: the wedding feast of the Lamb, this mystery of the covenant between God and humankind, the betrothal renewed between Christ and each one of us.

Routine always runs the risk of concealing this mystery. This is why we celebrate the Eucharist: to remind ourselves that this invitation that God makes to us is playing out at the heart of our lives: to live everything with him, to live everything in him. “Happy are those invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb”, as it says in the new French-language Order of Mass currently in the process of being finalised.

The wedding garment that Jesus speaks to us about is not a worldly one. To wear it is to enter into the Eucharist arrayed in this thrill of standing before the mystery. For we celebrate something which is infinitely beautiful and great: God’s friendship with us, this searching for us with which he is adorned, this mystery of love from which we come and towards which we go!

To put on the wedding garment is to prepare our hearts, to clothe our hearts. It is to dress ourselves in wonder and joy.... We don’t need great things for that: a simple party dress, even if it is a bit creased, will do!

There is no culture, I believe, in which a wedding celebration does not include singing and music. We sing at Mass because what is played out there recalls weddings. And therefore there is great rejoicing. And how can we rejoice without singing? Singing manages at one and the same time to plunge us into the innermost depths of our being and at the same time to lift us up outside ourselves.

In the First Reading, Ezekiel speaks to us of the great desire of the Lord: to give us a new heart and put a new spirit within us. “I will put my spirit in you, my breath.” “My breath” — here we already find echoes of what you are working at in this meeting, God knows, singing is about breath....and about renewing of the heart.

“I will give you a new heart.” To celebrate God and his mystery requires what many choirs do before they even begin to sing: those moments of deep breathing, getting in touch with the breath within you. Singing is the wedding garment which allows us to enter, celebrating; and to renew our hearts. Singing harmonises us with ourselves. And how much does it harmonise us with others! It starts to harmonise us with God. In this sense, singing helps us to join ourselves to this Breath which gives life to our own breath.

But there is something even more beautiful. This breath which makes us sing, doesn't it have its source in the very Breath of God in us, in his Spirit? When singing produces prayer, isn't that a sign that the Spirit trembles within us, that the Spirit inhabits us? The Holy Spirit is joined to our breath and that is what "gives us voice, in our mouth and on our lips" (Sister Dominique Rousselet).

Isn't it for this reason that singing produces in us what St Paul rightly called the fruits of the Spirit? — peace, joy, goodwill... We sing in the liturgy **in order to join ourselves to the Spirit**. And at the same time we sing **because the Spirit has been joined to us**. Isn't it always the Spirit who makes the desire to praise rise up within us?

This is why, even in times of trial, in suffering and grief, the liturgy invites us to sing, to allow the Spirit to make us sing, even if it's in a minor key. For we can also sing **in** the night, when we are overcome with loneliness, when we are beset by troubles. But the Black Americans have shown us very well that we can also sing **against** the night, to push away its grip on us, to confront sadness, to console ourselves, to be of good cheer once more. Isn't that once again the Breath of God giving new life to our own breath in order to exorcise evil and conquer death?

I will put my Spirit in you, says the Lord.... This is why we sing. This is why God likes to hear our voices!

Faith **and** singing, to believe **and** to sing "are words *qui vont très bien ensemble* [which go very well together], as a certain Paul McCartney sang (in French, too!)

St Paul cried out one day: "I believed, and therefore I spoke!" (2 Cor 4:13). We can say the same: "I believed, and therefore I sang!"

Trans. Paul Inwood