

'Someone gave a great dinner and invited many. ¹⁷At the time for the dinner he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, "Come; for everything is ready now." ¹⁸But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, "I have bought a piece of land, and I must go out and see it; please accept my apologies." ¹⁹Another said, "I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please accept my apologies." ²⁰Another said, "I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come." ²¹So the slave returned and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and said to his slave, "Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame." ²²And the slave said, "Sir, what you ordered has been done, and there is still room." ²³Then the master said to the slave, "Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled. ²⁴For I tell you, none of those who were invited will taste my dinner."

(Luke 14: 16-24)

I know that it is not allowed right now, but: I would like to invite all of you to a nice dinner at my home tonight. A long table wonderfully set, home-cooked food, good wine, coffee... other guests with whom you will certainly have interesting conversations...music of course.

Would you like to come? Tonight at 7 p.m.? Spontaneously?

That would be great, wouldn't it?

I have to admit, we had been inviting quite a number of friends, theologians like us, musicians, computer experts, journalists... We had already done the shopping and done the pre-cooking, when the first cancellations came in. And they got more and more until yesterday. Now we are in a somehow delicate situation. We don't want to throw away the food and above all: we were really looking forward to a nice evening. We don't want to blow it in the wind too quickly.

That's why I would like to invite you now - would you come?

Although it is at short notice... but please, do remember: The great food...! Don't worry - you don't have to answer now. Even though it would be interesting!

Maybe you have already experienced something similar... this unbelievable disappointment when you have been abandoned by other people, friends, colleagues... left alone with your pleasant anticipation, with the longing for a cheerful community, which at least for one evening lets you feel that you are not alone, that you are important to others... an experience from which

you can live on for a while. Food for the soul. We were not born to be lone wolves and hermits. We are born to live together in community and share our lives.

Then the first person comes and says that he has to see his recently bought field. Now. Exactly now. As if someone would buy a field, which he had not surveyed and measured before.

The next person has to examine his recently bought oxen. Now. Exactly now. Honestly: Who will buy livestock without having seen it before?

The third one misuses his newlywed wife as an excuse..

The text tells nothing more. Everything else is left to our imagination.

These three persons respond to the invitation in an unmistakable way: You are not important to us, dear friend. "Friend" in quotation marks. My field, my oxen, my intimate togetherness tonight are always more important. Your kindness – I don't care. Your longing for a common celebration – I don't care. Your shopping, the money you have already spent, the preparations, your time, your creativity – I don't care. Deep inside they are not interested at all.

What a frustration... The owner of the house became angry...

Maybe it was a good decision, that the three didn't come. Otherwise they would have talked all evening about how great they were. Or how clever they were to snatch someone else's field or oxen or even someone else's wife. What important men they were!

How happy they were – about something that connects them to themselves alone. About something that they do not share. The field has only one owner. The oxen have only one master. The woman has only one man. But the invitation is meant to bring about shared joy! A feast wants to bring many people together. A feast expects only a little something – besides accepting the invitation, of course: That we bring along our willingness to celebrate together – and also the willingness not to be the center of attention, that we bring along our willingness to share the pleasure of being noticed, to share the pleasure of celebrating with others, to celebrate with people who are not necessarily on the same wavelength, from whom many things separate us. To celebrate the richness of diversity.

But now this unbelievable disappointment, when you have been abandoned in the truest sense of the word... abandoned with your own anticipation, with your longing for a happy community, which at least for one evening lets you feel that you are not alone, that you do matter to others ... an experience which nourishes your will for life for a while.

Such an experience is soul food. We were not born to be lone wolves and hermits. We are born to live together in community and share our lives.

Just as God does.

It is God's story.

It is God's invitation to us!

It is God's deepest disappointment.

How God would love it if we did not say: Deep inside we are not interested in you at all, dear friend. "Friend" in quotation marks.

How God would love it if instead we said: We are invited?

Are you serious? No joke? My pleasure. I'd love to come! Can we bring something? No, of course not. We are invited.

We are invited to come from the roads and lanes of our lives. We are invited to come with our worries and questions. We are invited to come with our spiritual damages and our darkness. We are invited to come with our illnesses which exclude us from festivals because nobody wants to risk that we talk about it and spoil the atmosphere.

We are invited ... just as we are.

My pleasure to make you happy, God says. Therefore: Let us celebrate, celebrate in advance, share in advance, sing and dance, laugh and get to know each other, carry and guide each other, admonish and encourage each other, be silent together and talk with each other.

Let us raise our glass in a toast to each other.

To our life and to our love.

À votre santé! Cheers.

It is God's gift. God's invitation to us. For 70 years or 80, maybe a little more or a little less. With our lives, we give the answer...