

At the funeral for the late great preacher, Fred Craddock, Tom Long—a former colleague—got up and gave the sermon. And in his sermon, Long recounted the time he and Craddock attended an Atlanta Braves baseball game. About four rows in front of them was this group of young men, about college-age. Who started out the game rowdy, and only got rowdier as the game went on.

Finally, by the fifth inning, a band of black-shirted security guards—complete with earphones in their ears—came scurrying down the steps. They went to the row of offenders and pointed at the ring-leader. You can almost hear them say, “You! Yes, YOU! Come with us.” Anyway, they grabbed this guy by the arms and muscled him out of the stadium.

For a long moment, everyone sat silent. Thinking about what they had just witnessed. That’s when Craddock leaned over to Long and said, “Must not have had on a wedding garment.”

Now, all joking aside, this morning’s Gospel is no laughing matter. I mean, just when you thought you were safe in Jesus’ parable, the trap door opens up beneath you.

See, you thought any issue Jesus had was with those who snubbed the king’s invitation. It was *they* who refused to come to his wedding supper. *They* were the ones who insulted him with their bad manners. And if any servants of the king got injured or killed, *they* were to blame. But not you.

When the king decided to send his servants out to the highways and byways, inviting anyone and everyone to come feast at his table, you were more than happy to accept. You knew you were unworthy of such an offer, which made the deal that much sweeter.

So, here you are, on the guest list, welcomed into the banquet hall. You find your place card and take a seat at the table. When suddenly, the king taps you on the shoulder. “Hey Buster, who let *you* in here looking like that?” And then come his henchmen to drag you out kicking and screaming, dumping you back on the streets.

Now, to be fair, we don’t know this parable is really meant for you. But y’know, if it could happen to a guy like that—a guy who was actually eager to attend unlike those snobs turning their snoots up at the king—it could happen to anyone, right? Nobody’s safe.

So really, the question comes down to attire. How do you know if you’ve dressed appropriately? Because apparently that makes all the difference between being *in* or being *out*.

Well, when it comes to clothes, the Bible has a few things to say. It tells us that “All who have been baptized into Christ, have been clothed with Christ” (Galatians 3:27). It tells us that “you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed . . . in the image of its Creator” (Colossians 3:9-10). Then, it tells us that the saints in heaven have “washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb” (Revelation 7:14). That’s what it means to be baptized *into* Christ. Like those old cartoons where the star character would rise early in the morning, yawning and stretching, and then gets dressed for the day by being dropped into their outfit, Baptism drops you into Jesus.

The early Church even showed this in their baptismal rite. Their fonts would be in ground with two sets of stairs, one on either side. One set leading down and one set leading up. Before descending into the water, the candidates would cast aside their old clothes, which represented their old sinful lives. Then, after going down into the water to be baptized, they’d ascend the stairs and get a new white robe, which symbolized the putting on of Christ and His righteousness.

But even if you’ve accepted the King’s invitation, and you manage to meet dress code at the door. Here’s why you might still worry you stick out like a sore thumb. Because after you’ve gotten in, it’s easy to want to do a wardrobe change.

I mean, sometimes you might not like how it feels to be in Christ. You might prefer to slip into something a little more comfortable. Maybe it fits too snug and you feel constricted. Having to conform your life to God's commands can cramp your style. Or maybe you think the whole ensemble is too boring. And so you try to spruce it up with this or that sin. Or perhaps it's just getting worn out. After living as a Christian for so long, it feels like it's getting old. You're ready for a change. And if that's the case, then no wonder you're nervous the King might give you the boot. If you don't look the part now, you'll certainly seem out of place in heaven.

So take a look in the mirror today. See how it is you're dressed. Are you wearing the standard issue uniform handed out with every Baptism? Do you faithfully conform your life to who you are in Christ—showing Him off to the world? Or have you instead chosen to express yourself, representing your own interests? Have you lived contrary to the Gospel, and in essence cast aside your baptismal garment?

If so, you might feel pretty naked right now, what with your sin exposed and every eye in heaven on you. Maybe you're feeling around for something to cover up with but are coming up empty. You can almost hear the King's footsteps coming your way. But just before you're yanked out of your chair, suddenly you feel warmth and security. Your shame is covered. And Jesus envelopes you.

You see, just before climbing the cross, Jesus shed His outer garment. And while the gospels tell us it went to the soldiers, who cast lots for it, we know what really happened to it. It went to you.

Not just some seamless garment, woven from top to bottom. I'm talking about His bright robe of righteousness. Jesus laid that aside for you to be wrapped up in His holiness. His perfection, His blamelessness, the beauty of His character has all gone to you. And He instead has put on your sins and borne them away in crucifixion. Jesus got kicked out—not you—when God the Father, the King of heaven, turned His back on His Son. So that you would fit right in at the heavenly banquet.

That garment was given to you at Baptism. Perhaps when you look back on photos of that day, you can see it. That is, many of you were dressed up in some kind of white garment on your Baptism day. One that points you to the greater garment you received, the righteousness of Christ. Others of you received a baptismal napkin or towel, representing the same thing.

But today, if you have sullied that garment; if you've changed it for a different set of clothes; if you've lived as if that garment didn't mean a thing; here's the only thing that means something. You have again put on Christ this morning. Because when you repent and believe the Gospel, your Baptism is renewed and your spotless garment is restored. That's really what Holy Absolution is, like the forgiveness of sins you received at the start of the service. It is a renewal of your Baptism, and the restoration of your robe of righteousness.

Whatever old thing you settled for from the back of your closet—y'know, your former life of sin—that's not so becoming on you. But these new threads—well, they're all the rage in heaven. And if you just give them a chance, I think you'll find that they suit you best. Now go ahead, you're all set for the party!