

Wedding Banquet  
(from: Joy is like the  
Rain)

(1") Recognise the words? They're from the Gospel read at Mass yesterday. The music and the singing, by a group of American missionary sisters, who are now scattered round the world. This isn't their best song - I chose it because of the relevance of its text, because it's a scriptural text. You may not like its setting, (and it's NOT for singing in church) but you know, the idea of putting the words of scripture into popular song form is not by any means a new idea, tho' in recent years there have been many and various attempts at doing it, some of them quite successful. The point is, we ~~too~~ too often hear the word of God on Sundays, listen to it attentively maybe, but then go out and forget all about it. The stories Jesus told (parables and so on) and thro' which He made His points a great part of His teaching, had a function not unlike modern folk-songs, ballads a pop - in an oral tradition, before books came in, people listened to and told stories over and over again. They were compact, easy to remember, easy to repeat: like the modern music, they were constantly repeated - except that their life-span, for various reasons, was far longer. So, this story Jesus told, about people invited to a banquet, is admirably suited to the kind of treatment the sisters have given it in this recording - its purpose is achieved when you find yourself humming, to their tune, "I cannot come": you remember - which is a great help to understanding what Christ meant by the story. "I cannot come" - a summary of all the excuses we're always making to refuse the invitations of God, sometimes even not seeing that they are mere excuses, because in truth we don't want to have to put ourselves out. In our prayer today, let's

Ave Verum  
(Byrd) etc.

try to forget the excuses and be open to accept the changes, possibly the revolution in our lives which God wants. PRAYERS. For a prayer in music today, as we're still within a week of the feast of Corpus Christi, let's listen to the 14<sup>th</sup> c. hymn, Ave Verum: the setting is <sup>W</sup>Byrd's ~~of~~ faith in Christ's presence with us in the Eucharist.

The time after Pentecost, in the Church year, has two general themes of celebration: the Church itself, as the creation of the Holy Spirit and the continuance of Christ's mission to the world; and then, coming up to Advent again, the consummation of all Christ's work in the joy and life of the eternal New Jerusalem. Yesterday's two scripture readings at Mass fit precisely into this pattern <sup>and carry us on from Easter-Pentecost.</sup> The parable Jesus told the plarisees was part of His explanation of God's plan for mankind, of His own mission and of the meaning of the Church. A great supper, a banquet, is a regular image for the happiness, joy, friendship, life of heaven, in the company of our Father and all whom He loves. This is what He plans for the people He creates: but it's a free gift, we're invited there, not forced to attend. His chosen people were the first to be invited: but when they found themselves too busy to bother, they also found that they'd lost their special place. Others have been invited instead - people with no claim whatever to be there, people who hadn't been given any special role or promise, people whose defects & faults would seem to human eyes, to make them ineligible for such great honour. / The great supper, since Christ came to give us news of the invitation and how to accept it, has in fact already begun in a sacramental way (the way of symbol & sign, which is also reality because He

Himself is there). It's ~~the~~ <sup>here</sup> in His own Last Supper, and the prolongation of that sign of His love and the community of His followers which we call the Mass. It's here in the Church, which is most itself when gathered together round the Lord's table. And this is where that other scripture reading yesterday, from St. John's 1<sup>st</sup> letter, fits in. It's a community of love, patterned on the love God has for us, a love which expresses itself most forcefully in Christ's laying down of His life for our sakes. This means we've got to do the same, if necessary. It means we can't let anything come between us and our fellow-men whom God loves. It means our gathering together for the Lord's supper isn't completely authentic until ~~we're~~ <sup>we're</sup> wholly in love with all God's people and so with Him — of course, in this imperfect world, we're only striving for this: and the sacrament is there precisely to make our striving effective. The point is, to keep on trying, to keep on helping others, being concerned for them, just because of God's love. But this is just where we start making excuses — ~~I~~ I want to be excused because ... I've a family to look after, a job to do, an exam. to study for, a business contract to clinch; I need time to relax, I can't be bothered. Excuses remind you ... because of course there are ed important things too, in their own ways, which must be given our full attention. But they're not excusing causes for our refusing to love our neighbour. "I cannot come" is too easy to say