



**His Excellency,  
The Most Reverend Edward K. Braxton, Ph.D., S.T.D.  
Diocese of Belleville**

**Twenty-Eighth Sunday of Ordinary Time**

**October 15, 2023, 11:00 mass**

**St. Theresa Parish, Belleville**

**Sermon:**

**“Many are Called, but Few are Chosen”  
(War in the Holy Land)**

(This is the text as originally written. During the actual delivery, some passages were omitted and other comments were added spontaneously. *Nota bene*: This text has not been thoroughly proofread. Therefore, there may be errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation.)

**Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:**

**“Many are called, but few are chosen.” With these challenging words, Jesus of Nazareth in Mathew 22, 1-14 concludes His provocative parable, The Kingdom of Heaven is like..., a king who has a wedding feast for his son. But no one comes. Then the king tells his servants to invite anyone they see on the street; the good and the bad. But one of the guests is not wearing the proper wedding garment- so the king throws him out in the darkness where he can weep for not dressing for this important event! In the last few weeks, we have heard several parables of Jesus telling us what the Kingdom of Heaven is LIKE. But nowhere in the gospels does Jesus tell us exactly what the Kingdom of Heaven is. You have been listening to these parables all of your life. What do you think the Kingdom of Heaven is?**

**Some Christians think the Kingdom of Heaven is simply Christians living their everyday lives in peace and happiness. Others think the Kingdom of Heaven is living the prosperity gospel of good health, long life, and money**

**in the bank. There are those who think the Kingdom of Heaven is a spiritual world of joy and harmony that can be experienced partially here on earth but can only be fully experienced in Heaven, the life of the world to come. I'm afraid many Catholics hear Jesus talking about the Kingdom of Heaven year after year and never bother to think about what He means. But many Christians believe the Kingdom of Heaven is the power of God's grace, enabling all people everywhere to live as sisters and brothers in communities of beloved disciples in relationships of love, peace, justice, and concern for others.**

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**Whatever Jesus means by the Kingdom of Heaven, one thing is certain, what is unfolding in the place Christians call the Holy Land, which the world knows as the State of Israel, is the very opposite of the Kingdom of Heaven. The place where the Lord Jesus talked about the Kingdom of Heaven is now a land engulfed by terrorism, war, violence, unspeakable suffering, and death! Last Saturday on the Jewish holiday, Shavuot, in a conflict that dates back to the establishment of Israel in 1948, the terrorist Palestinian militant group, Hamas, outwitting Israeli intelligence, fired more than 5,000 rockets into Israel, broke through border fences, landed on Israeli beaches, began taking hostages and a house to house brutal slaughter of innocent Jewish families, especially women and children. Israel is in mourning, and some are demanding an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.**

**More than 1,400 Jewish people, including 28 United States citizens died in this barbaric attack, provoking prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu to declare a state of war between Israel and Hamas. He has already dropped 6,000 bombs that have left more than 2,400 Palestinians in the Gaza dead, and tens of thousands injured or displaced. Israel has cut off food, water, electricity, and, after daily bombings, is preparing for what will be a devastating ground war as well as a humanitarian disaster. Israel has amassed an army of 400,000 soldiers at the border of Gaza. One million Palestinian Muslims and Christians have been told to leave Gaza with no place to go, even though most Palestinians are young people who do not support Hamas terrorists, whose stated goal is the destruction of the Jewish people.**

**Many believe that Iran has played a key role in supporting Hamas's attack on Israel. Hezbollah in Lebanon has also begun to strike Israel. Nearby Syria also seems to be preparing for conflict. The United Nations fears this**

**terrible eruption of violence could spread into a regional war, ensnaring the United States in a deadly political and moral quagmire.**

**In the past, the United States government has been sharply critical of Israel's oppressive, unjust treatment of the Palestinian people, making a two-state solution impossible. However, due to the recent attacks, President Joseph Biden, expressing anguish over the suffering of Israelis from inexcusable hatred and violence, stressed that the United States stands with Israel, our closest ally in the region. The President sent the world's largest and most powerful aircraft carrier, the USS Gerald R. Ford, to patrol the waters of the eastern Mediterranean Sea, as a warning to neighboring nations not to become involved in this conflict. The president said many American families are feeling the pain of the Hamas attack, mindful of the scars inflicted through millennia of antisemitism and the persecution of the Jewish people.**

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**Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ:**

**It is a great moral paradox that this bloody turmoil is taking place where Jesus of Nazareth, who was Himself Jewish, walked the streets of Jerusalem, the city of His triumphant entry, His last supper, blood sweating prayers in the garden of Gethsemane, His crucifixion, death, and the impenetrable mystery of His resurrection. Surely, as committed Christians, we must be filled with anxiety, wondering, "How?, Why?," are these terrifying events happening in the land where the Prince of Peace went about proclaiming the nearness of the Kingdom of Heaven.**

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**Jesus in Mathew 22, 1-14, tells us that the king invited the good and the bad to his son's joyful wedding feast since the original guests didn't show up. But then, the king sees a man who is not wearing the formal wedding garment. Addressing him paradoxically as "My friend," the king asks why the guest is not wearing the proper white robe provided for guests. The king tells his servants, "Bind his hands and feet, and cast him into the darkness outside, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."**

**“Many are called, but few are chosen.” Could this mean, as some have thought, that the man was sent to hell because he was not wearing the white robe of Christian discipleship? But the king (that is, God) specifically invited the good and the bad to His Son’s (that is, Jesus’s) wedding feast.**

**The parables of Jesus are not always easy to understand. They are open to many possible interpretations. Could Jesus be saying that only God, His father, knows who will share in the joy of eternal life? Could He be saying that the Jewish people are not chosen because they do not accept Him and His good news (as some have thought)? Could He be saying that we should not be self-righteous and presume that just because we are regular church goers that heaven will be ours? “Many are called, but few are chosen!” Could these words be a reminder of the challenging truth that we do not save ourselves by our good deeds, and that Christ alone brings salvation?**

**As we are fed by Christ’s Body and Blood in this morning’s Eucharist, let us pray and hope that Christ, with benevolent love, will bring all people, even those caught up in the violent turmoil of fratricidal war, to the eternal joy of the Kingdom of Heaven. “Many are called, but few are chosen!”**

**As you go about this chilly autumn day, you may be thinking that the cataclysmic war unfolding as we speak is far from you and it cannot have any real impact on your life. You may be thinking that since there is nothing you can do to bring about peace between Israel and Hamas, there is nothing you can do to prevent senseless violence and killing, there is no reason to allow this morning’s headlines to disturb your serene activities. If you think that, you would be denying the teachings of Jesus about the unity of the entire human family. Why not take a few moments this afternoon or this evening and quietly pray the Rosary for peace? And as you do so, ask yourself what Jesus might be saying to you personally when He says, “Many are Called, but Few are Chosen.”**

**Praise be Jesus Christ. Both now and forever. Amen!**

