

Garment of Salvation

Today's Old Testament reading from Isaiah uses the image of garments or clothing to describe mankind's spiritual state, an allusion that we find from the very beginning to the end of scripture. These words from the prophet Isaiah are among the first words I pray when I clothe myself for worship; "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my whole being shall exult in my God; for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels." **Is 61:10**

Our clothing is a profound image when speaking of heavenly things—which we will get to—but it is also a very important aspect of our daily lives. I have been reminded of the importance of clothes, since all our clothes are currently in boxes from our recent move within Pinellas. And though I have no idea where any of my other clothes are, the first thing I did was hang 10 black clergy shirts, pants and some shoes. This is all I need, because I wear a uniform. My clothes, a shirt with a little white collar expresses who I am and what my work is about. When people see me dressed as clergy, they sometimes treat me really nicely and sometimes keep extra distance. But the clergy uniform expresses to people my affiliation with the church and implies a spiritual presence within me. Clothes can be important.

I don't know how many of our kids, like Narek, wear uniforms to school. He wears nice khaki pants and a blue "Canterbury School" shirt. What does his dress say? It says that whoever you are individually, at this school you are a student. You will dress neatly and respectfully and follow rules which apply to all. Last Friday at Canterbury School --"wear your pajamas to school day," was an exception, but it actually proved the rule of the importance of dress. Narek hesitated to go, because he feels strongly that pajamas are for sleep and lounging in the home, not school! Our society has strong rules about dress, which are so engrained that we rarely think about them. Would anyone here wear white to a funeral, or black to a wedding? Absolutely not. Why? Because what you wear on the outside reflects something of how you are on the inside. You are sad for the deceased and their family at a funeral, and the color which expresses your sympathy with the family is black; vice versa for a wedding.

We spend much time and money on clothes in this world, but they are even more significant in the world to come. The Bible is preoccupied with clothing, with far too many images and illustrations to mention today. Suffice to say, that from the beginning of time, the very beginning, clothes mattered. What was the first thing that Adam and Eve realized after they disobeyed God? They realized that they were now naked. What is the last image we have of Jesus in the oldest ending of the Gospel of Mark? Our Lord himself stripped naked on the cross. We come into this world naked, and we leave it so. We are mortals, our clothes peel off from us no matter how many shirts or dresses fill our closets. Our bodies themselves are clothes, which one day we will shed.

Fortunately, in today's reading, we are reminded that God's people, you and I, are graced with access to an immortal garment, one which does not falter or fade. My very first prayer as a priest on behalf of you and I is for this garment. As I put on my white shabig in the morning, I pray "Clothe me, Lord, with the garment of salvation and with a robe of gladness, and gird me with this vestment of salvation, by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ to whom is befitting glory, dominion and honor, now and always and unto the ages of ages. Amen"

This powerful prayer, which I hope you all will pray-before worship and when you dress every morning-acknowledges that every single baptized Christian has a uniform to wear, one which never falters or fades. It is white, white like my shabig, white like your choir shabigs, white like the baptismal suits which we all wore. It is white like light, like the God of light in whom there is no darkness at all.

Our whole mission as Christians is to learn to ask for and wear this invisible cloak of grace. To not worry and waste over clothing that temporarily hides our mortality, but to stand vulnerable before God as we are, trusting that he will clothe us in his grace and righteousness. When we do this, we find that God's garment of salvation, like all other clothing, expresses something essential to others about who we are on the inside. It expresses empathy for those afflicted, more than cloth of the deepest black. It expresses joy for this life and the next, more than cloth of the most radiant white. It expresses undying hope that all that passes away in this life, will be redeemed and made immortal like brilliant threads of gold and silver...which never fade and reflect the eternal light of Our Saviour, now and always, amen.