

PRAY Jesus, you invite us to be your guest at every Eucharist, to remember you and eat at a table you set for us. Help us put you first in our lives instead of putting you off till later. Help us say, "Yes, I'm coming to your party." Amen.

SPiRIT

Nine-year-old Amendnur "Akey" Jumale had never seen snow before moving to Marshall, Minnesota.

In fact, many things in the rural town of 13,000 were very different from his native Somalia. Getting up at dawn and heading to school replaced mornings spent praying at the mosque. Evenings of homework took the place of twilight soccer games, and sprawling cornfields took the place of sandy coastline.

"I didn't even speak English," says Akey. "They put me in a class of all white people speaking English. I was shaking." But that challenge was small compared to life in Somalia. "It was dangerous there," Akey recalls. "Fifteen-year-olds carried guns."

Akey's father was determined to give his family a new life in a new country. He saw Marshall as a peaceful place to work and educate his children. They arrived just as several other Somali families began trickling into town to work at a turkey plant.

The new Somali families splashed pallid neighborhoods with color.

Women clad in vibrant dresses and head shawls drew curious looks as they walked to the grocery store. Giggling Somali children ran barefoot through a city park.

"The first year I was in Marshall it was very much a white school with very few spatters of color," says Wade McKittrick, principal at the high school. "The last three or four years we're really starting

birthday party

Have you ever felt unwelcome at a party? How?

What's the best party you ever attended? Why? Who was there? What did you do?

What's the best party you've given or helped give? How did you get people to come and feel welcome?

What makes a great party great?

Have you ever given a party and no one came? What happened? How would you feel if it happened to you?

family gathering ● **DANCE PARTY** ● **going away party** ● **end of the season/class party** ● **HALLOWEEN PARTY** ● **graduation party** ● **CHURCH PARTY** ● **VICTORY PARTY**

valentine party



Real Victory

by Drew Geraets



Tom recalls one unlikely group of supporters they encountered on a training run. **“There was a crew fixing the road and these big construction guys were like ‘Go get ‘em at state!’”** he recalls. **“The same day cars were honking their horns at us.”**

to see other ethnic groups.” Some communities struggle with such changes.

In another Minnesota town, white teenagers chased down a 12-year-old Somali boy with baseball bats and knocked out several of his teeth. A 64-year-old Somali man and 13-year-old Somali boy were also beaten in other racially motivated incidents. In another small town vandals scrawled hate graffiti on buildings owned and used by the Somali community.

In Marshall, a group of white students shouted racial slurs and threatened violence at Akey and a friend as they were driving. The two called police and filed a report. While rumors circulated, violence never materialized. Still, a sense of uneasiness hung in the air.

Art teacher Mike Jacobs remembers “A lot of people were wondering, ‘What’s going on?’” Jacobs soon learned just what the changes would mean to him as head cross-country coach at Marshall Senior High.

Akey and his older brother, Hussein, ventured down to the art room in the red-brick high school, ducking under mobiles and maneuvering around sculptures. They said they were interested in running for the team. Jacobs eyed the brothers. They looked every bit as lanky as the corn stalks surrounding the town—a perfect build for distance running. Later, Jacobs learned their father was once an

Olympic marathoner. But, how would other students welcome these new teammates?

Sophomore Bart Johnson and freshman Tom Allen quickly bonded with the Jumale brothers.

Tom made wake-up calls to Akey and Hussein for Saturday morning practice and Bart swung by their apartment to provide transportation. Akey spent so much time in Bart’s car he began to call it “our car.” The relationship extended to the school halls and weekend bonfires. “They’re my friends and I want to see them succeed,” Bart says. “So, I do whatever I can to help them.”

Succeed they did. The Marshall Tigers track team made their first-ever appearance at the state meet and finished 11th. Although Hussein left high school the following year, the number of immigrant runners continued to increase. Akey quickly evolved into the team’s unofficial recruiter, bringing in neighbors and friends to run with Tom, Bart, and the rest of the group.



Yahya Iman, a compactly built runner from Uganda, joined the track team as a freshman. He steadily improved, promising to come out for cross country the following fall. Three months later in his first meet Yahya was the Tigers’ top finisher and placed second overall. The team once again made it to the state meet; this time, the Tigers finished second.

By now Bart, Tom, and blonde farm kid Jon Tauer were familiar faces and mini-celebrities to many young Somali students in the halls. Jon thinks his friendship with runners like the Jumale brothers helped break down some of the barriers separating the two cultures at school. The boys continued to work together in practice and welcomed Akey’s younger brother, Dahir, into their running family. Dahir, then a soft-spoken ninth-grader, finished third overall in his first meet, trailing only teammates Yahya and Tom.

In their third year together, the boys soon found their team in the national rankings. Assistant coach Julie Keucker crisscrossed golf courses, shouting words of encouragement in Somali. Her new language skills were her attempt to embrace a new culture.

The runners’ families spread the effort as the squad qualified for yet another state meet.

Tom’s mom, Julie Allen, asked Yahya to invite his mother to make some of their traditional foods for the team’s final meal. Yahya’s mother, Mano Duxull, readily agreed.

SUNDAY GOSPEL

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Who are the king's guests?

NARRATOR: Jesus addressed the chief priests and elders of the people, once more using parables.

JESUS: The reign of God is like a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son. He sent servants to summon the invited guests to the wedding, but they refused to come. He sent servants a second time.

KING: Say to my guests, "See, I have my dinner prepared! I have killed my

bullocks and corn-fed cattle; everything is ready. Come to the feast."

JESUS: The invited guests ignored the king's invitation and went their way—one to his farm, another to his business. The rest laid hold of the king's servants, insulted them, and killed them. At this point the king grew furious and sent his army to destroy those murderers and burn their city. Then he said to his servants:

KING: The banquet is ready, but those who were invited were unfit to come. Now go out into the byroads and invite anyone you find to the wedding.

JESUS: The servants then went out into the byroads and rounded up everyone they met, bad as well as good. This filled the wedding hall with banqueters.

Matthew 22.1-14

"When I came to the door and introduced myself, Mano was so excited to have me!" Julie recalls. The food was a hit with the team as the boys passed over American cuisine and dug into dishes that included goat meat. As the runners ate, Julie observed the strong bonds among them. "Tom played basketball until ninth grade, and the team never had the family closeness I see here," she says.

One evening Tom and his mother came to teammate Salah Mohamed's wedding reception, a nightlong event that started at midnight. Tom saw friends and hopped out of the car to join them. Alone and feeling out of place, Julie sat nervously in her car.

"Pretty soon Hussein came and said I needed to come," Julie recalls. "I said no, that I wouldn't know anybody."

Then, another man approached and invited her inside. "I said no and he said, 'Yeah, you come with the mamas,'" she says with a laugh. Julie watched the women dance and chant, gaining a new appreciation for her Somali neighbors.

Following an all-school pep rally, the Tigers headed to their third-straight state meet. Running with grit and determination, the Tiger runners in blaze-orange uniforms charged out at the start and quickly established position at the front of the pack.

Yahya dueled the defending state champion and finished just seconds behind him. Both runners broke the 18-year-old record. The crowd turned to see who would emerge next over the hill: it was a string of orange. Somali and American

QUESTIONS

- 1 Why do people in Marshall accept rather than reject the Somali runners?
- 2 How do you imagine being an immigrant feels?
- 3 What is the real victory in this story?
- 4 What invitations have you turned down in the past year?
- 5 What invitation are you glad you accepted?
- 6 What invitations from God do you turn down? Or accept?

parents cheered together as news of the final scores spread. The Tigers had achieved their dream: a state championship.

"It was a dream season," Coach Jacobs says.

Tom's Irish heritage and Akey's Somali roots cooperatively led to a state championship and showed the rest of the community and state how two different cultures could work together to reach a common goal. By chasing their running dreams, the boys created friendships that bridged any surface differences. "St. Patrick's Day and Ramadan are now big holidays for the cross country team," Tom jokes.



Jesus tells parables.

Jesus often teaches in symbolic stories called parables. A parable is a short story that makes a comparison. Jesus is famous for parables that compare the kingdom of God to happenings in everyday life.

In last Sunday's parable renters refuse to hand over an owner's rightful share of the grape harvest. This Sunday guests refuse an invitation to dinner.

Jesus wants us to see that the door to the kingdom of God opens in our daily lives. We meet God in interacting with family, classmates, and neighbors, both close and global.

A parable works like a mirror. In its plot and characters we see people like ourselves. We see relationships and situations like our own. When a parable challenges us to judge and decide what a character in the parable should do, we are making judgments and decisions like those we make in our lives. Jesus' parables help us reflect on the person we want to be and the community we want to build among us.

The gospel writers Matthew and Luke both tell the parable in Sunday's gospel. Luke's version is simple—a man prepares a big dinner and invites guests who refuse to come. What should the man do? In Luke the man invites the poor to share his dinner.

What do the man's actions in Luke reveal about the kingdom of God? We find God and establish God's reign where we care for people who are poor. Luke describes Jesus as a prophet anointed to bring good news to the poor.



Matthew's version is symbolic. Matthew echoes Israel's prophets to show his Jewish audience that Jesus is the long-awaited messiah.

The prophet Hosea compares the covenant between God and Israel to a marriage relationship. The prophet Isaiah pictures what God wants for humankind as a great feast on God's holy mountain for all peoples of the earth. They will eat rich food and abundant drink. God will destroy death and wipe the tears from each one's face (Isaiah 25.6-8).

Drawing on these symbols, Matthew's version becomes a parable about a king who gives a marriage feast for his son.

The king is God.

The king's son is Jesus, who is Israel's messiah.

The marriage is the new covenant that Jesus makes with humankind through his life, death, and resurrection.

The banquet is the feast of abundance to which God invites all people, the beginning of a new relationship between God and the people in Jesus the Christ.

The guests who refuse to come to the feast are those among Jesus' own people who don't believe he is the long-awaited messiah.

The king's army that kills the guests who refuse to come refers to the Roman soldiers who stopped a Jewish rebellion in A.D. 70. They destroyed Israel's temple and the city of Jerusalem.

The servants the king sends to invite people to the wedding feast are Israel's prophets.

The servants who go to the byroads to invite anyone they can find are Christian missionaries.

The new guests are the Gentiles who believe in Jesus.

The parable as Jesus told it was closer to Luke's simple version. A man invites guests to a big party but no one comes. What does he do? He extends the invitation to new guests. What does this show about the kingdom of God? God invites all people to friendship.

Matthew's symbolic parable focuses on Jesus, the king's son, who is Israel's messiah and bridegroom. The king invites the Gentiles into the new covenant community when the original guests don't believe in Jesus. Matthew incorporates two historical events into his parable—an allusion to the destruction of Jerusalem and the faith of so many Gentiles.

FAITH in ACTION

1 When have you experienced events that celebrate all peoples and their cultures? What might your group do to celebrate the diversity of cultures in your parish? Who is not being invited into your parish or student body at school? What can you do individually or as a group? **2** Be on alert for derogatory comments about people based on race, age, religion, ethnic background, abilities. Talk about how to counter them.