

MATTHEW 22:1-14.

1. And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said,
2. The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son,
3. And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come.
4. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage.
5. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise:
6. And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them.
7. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.
8. Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy.
9. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage.
10. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests.
11. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment:
12. And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless.
13. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.
14. For many are called, but few are chosen.

This parable is both a prophesy and a spiritual warning. Jesus Christ is speaking first to the Jewish people, the chosen nation of the Old Testament, and then to us, Orthodox Christians. He is predicting what will result from His earthly mission and is warning us about what awaits us if we fail to live up to the call to Salvation that God mercifully extends to every one of us. The King in the parable is the Lord God. His Son is, of course, Jesus Christ. The bride of the Son is the Church established by God to save people. And the wedding feast is the Kingdom of Heaven.

Using the prophets as His messengers, God first called out to the Jewish people in the Old Testament Church to come into His Kingdom. Despite their special status as the chosen nation, the Jewish people became too attached to earthly life and for the most part rejected the call. Showing incredible mercy, the Lord continued to call them, but they responded with either

complete indifference or aggression. They mocked, beat, and killed God's emissaries. They even turned on the Savior and had Him killed. For this, they were punished through the Roman army who attacked them when they rebelled against Rome. Many were killed, the Temple and Jerusalem were destroyed, and the remnants of the nation were scattered around the world.

In place of the Jews, God then turned to the pagans and called them through the apostles. Desiring to save all people, God called both the good and the bad to fill the empty seats at the wedding feast. What this image portrays is the New Testament Church whose doors are open to anyone wishing to come in.

The last part of the parable talks about the person who was present at the feast but not dressed accordingly. Therefore, he was evicted and thrown out into the "outer darkness". This person serves as a grave reminder to us. Each one of us can be that person. When we enter into Christ's Church, we are bound by oaths given at our baptism. We are given free access to the Grace of the Holy Spirit which empowers us to live a righteous and pious life according to Christ's commandments. When we live in such a way, we are wearing the proper "wedding garment" and are worthy guests at the wedding feast.

But not everyone who enters into the Church remains worthy of that honor. For many are called, but few are chosen. Like the Jews in the Old Testament, many Orthodox Christians are tempted away by the pleasures and values of this world. They forget about or simply ignore the fact that every guest to the wedding feast will be scrutinized by the Host. Their manner of living is revealed by the garment that they are wearing, which is not a wedding garment. They are that evicted man in the parable. Each one of them will hear the words of the Host: Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, God is all-merciful. But He is also all-just. As much as He desires the salvation of every single person, He also does not infringe on our free will. If we wish to be His worthy guests at the wedding feast that He prepared for His Son, we must try to live according to His commandments and sincerely repent when we fail. If we do this, we are wearing the wedding garment and will be His eternal welcome guests. But if we choose not to, God honors our choice. What awaits us then, however, is an eternity of outer darkness and the gnashing of teeth. I pray that all of us become so inspired by this Gospel's message that we do everything necessary with God's help to preserve our wedding garment and never lose our seat at God's Table.

With Much Love in Christ,

Archpriest Serge Kotar