

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Although Jesus spoke this parable as a warning to His countrymen, the Hebrew people, the message in it is most relevant to us, Orthodox Christians. It makes us look inside of ourselves to answer the all-important question, am I truly a Christian or simply calling myself one.

Luke 14: 16-24

16. A certain man made a great supper, and bade many:
17. And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready.
18. And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused.
19. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused.
20. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.
21. So that servant came, and shewed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind.
22. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room.
23. And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.
24. For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.

The man making this supper is none other than our Lord, Jesus Christ. The supper that he made is the Kingdom of God that starts not in Heaven but here on earth in our hearts. Another name for this supper is the Christian Church, our Orthodox Church. A great preparation was made by our Savior for this supper. He came down to earth and became a human being, joining His humanity eternally with His divinity. As such, He is a true God-man. He lived amongst people teaching them by His Word and personal example. He suffered and died for us, sinners, to reconcile us with God. He resurrected Himself to allow us to be able to also resurrect for eternal life. He ascended to Heaven paving the way for us to ascend. Finally, He sent down the Holy Spirit to establish and maintain His Church on earth through which we are able to achieve salvation. All of this was the preparation for the never -ending supper which is now ready for people to partake of.

We are the people who are being invited to this supper. Our invitation started with our baptism which was reinforced by our being chrismated with the Grace of the Holy Spirit. The evening attire that we should be dressed in for this dinner is obtained through our going to confession and receiving Holy Communion as well as our good deeds and our life that we live according to the commandments of God. But, are we ready and willing to commit to this eternal supper?

We live in this world. It has many attractions and places great demands on us. At the same time, we are not of this world but traveling through it on the way to Heaven. And to reach Heaven we have to make very difficult decisions. We often find ourselves facing a great dilemma. We continually have to decide what is more important to us, our earthly life and the joys and comforts it provides for us or the sacrifices that we need to make in order to complete our travel and successfully reach the Gates of Heaven. How do we maintain a correct balance between our fulfilling the demands of our earthly life with the demands of our spiritual life? Which of these demands do we think are more important? The demands to which we find ourselves devoting our time and effort are a revelation to us of where our heart lies. Is it with God or with this world?

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, yes, it is not easy to be a true Orthodox Christian instead of simply being called one. It takes great effort and much sacrifice to live as a true Christian in a sinful world with all of the distractions, demands and pleasures this world tempts us with. But, let us consider what we receive from this world and what the Kingdom of God gives us. This world can offer us only temporary benefits because it too is only temporary. And the rewards that it gives us during our life here are very short lived and fragile. The Kingdom of God, on the other hand, is eternal and the rewards are so great that they cannot be adequately described in human language. We know this to be true because we are promised this by God Himself. And we have testimony to this truth by saints like St Seraphim of Sarov and others who were permitted to visit the Heavenly realms of God while still alive in this life. Therefore, let each of us examine our life and give it an honest assessment. Is our heart with God or with this World? Am I living according to God's commandments or according to the demand of this world? What better time to make such a self-examination than right now when we are quickly approaching the glorious celebration of the birth of our Savior. And let us make what corrections are necessary in order to prevent God's stern words, "For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper" from being words that apply to us.

In closing I would like to greet all of you with the approaching end of 2014 and wish you the very best as we begin the New Year, 2015.

With Love in Christ,
Archpriest Serge Kotar