

The Parable of the Great Banquet
Luke 14:16-24, December 12, 2021

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A certain wealthy pharisee had prepared an elaborate supper for friends and acquaintances. Our Savior was among those who had been invited. It was while dining at this festivity that our Savior spoke the parable which we heard in today's Gospel. Just prior to this, also in Luke's Gospel, the Lord admonished us against vainglory and seeking the praise of men by inviting rich neighbors to supper or dinner. Instead, our motivation should be to show love and mercy to the poor, the ill, those who are lonely and the downtrodden. The Lord goes on to say that when we make a dinner or a supper we should invite "the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind." Instead of earthly honor, our recompense will be in the resurrection.

The first thing that comes to mind when we read about a meal is the Eucharist. A supper is typically an evening meal, and it reminds us of the Mystical Supper (or Last Supper), as well as the sacrifice of the Divine Paschal Lamb Who was crucified towards the evening by the light of torches. In today's parable *everyone* is invited to the great banquet, just as the Lord bids *everyone* to partake of the Bread from Heaven which gives life to the world, for "the forgiveness of sins, the cleansing away of all defilement, the communion of the Holy Spirit, the glorious adoption as sons, and the kingdom of heaven."¹ The next thing that comes to mind is the Kingdom of Heaven itself, because Holy Scripture describes the Kingdom as a "Heavenly Banquet" (Isaiah 25:6). In Psalm 2:6 it says "But I have been set as a king by Him; that is, by God the Father; upon Zion His holy mount, to preach the commandment of the Lord. and again, I was not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Therefore, before all others, Israel is first invited to the banquet. Sadly they make excuses, because being covetous and greedy after wealth, they have become senselessly attached to earthly matters which are transitory, and cannot see the things which are spiritual and eternal. When the Householder (God) in the parable heard their refusal, He was angry. Now God the Father invites the poor, the maimed, the blind, and the the lame to attend the great banquet. We are told that still there is room. And finally the Householder not only invites but *compels* all the Gentiles, everyone and everywhere to come to the banquet. Why does Scripture use the word *compel*, when we know that our heavenly Father invites us but it is up to us whether or not we choose to follow Him? Although faith is voluntary, God uses every means to try to convince His children to follow Him, to love Him as He loves us, and to choose to partake of the eternal joy and celebration which has been prepared for each and every one of us in His Kingdom. God loves all mankind and wishes that all men and women should be saved.

Life can be very hard. We often face difficult choices. Afterwards, sometimes for a lifetime, we agonize over the choices we have made in our lives. Sometimes we beat ourselves up and agonize that we could have done better, or perhaps, we think, if we had done things differently, things may have turned out differently and better. Most of all we agonize about how our actions affected the lives of others, particularly those whom we love. I don't think that it is good to beat ourselves up. For one thing, I would suggest that we always remember that our loving Father in heaven is always watching out for us and trying to help us in any way that He can. Good things can come out of bad things, and although we cannot change the past, there is nothing that cannot be fixed. Furthermore, we still have the present and the future. No one is perfect and we all make mistakes. In as much as we have the great gift of free will, God still works with us and takes a direct action in human affairs. Primarily our choices should be made with sincerity and out of love and mercy. Before we can show mercy to others we must first learn to be merciful to ourselves. Brothers and sisters, let us pray to the Lord to help us to love Him above all things. Let us be careful not to become overwhelmed by the vain distractions of this world. Let us not imitate those who had all sorts of excuses and, God forbid, rejected the invitation to come to the Great Banquet of our Father. And if perchance, for whatever reason,

there is any among us who no longer heeds the invitation of God and attends the banquet in the house of our Father, then let us now consider returning to the arms of our Father who awaits our return. What better time to do this than during the Christmas season? My prayer for all of us is that during this holy season while we are preparing to celebrate the Birth of our Savior we may all experience Divine and spiritual peace, joy and love. Now is not the time for regrets about the past. Now is the time for rejoicing and thinking about the present, the here and now, and about what awaits us in the future. I leave you with the prayer which is sung after the Great Doxology at Great Compline on the eve of the Great Feast of the Nativity: "Let heaven and earth today make glad prophetically. Angels and men, let us keep spiritual feast. For God, born of a woman, has appeared in the flesh to those that sit in darkness and shadow. A cave and a manger have received Him. Shepherds announce the wonder; Magi from the east offer gifts in Bethlehem. Let us, then, from our unworthy lips offer praise like the angels: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace. For the Expectation of the nations has come, He has come and saved us from the bondage of the enemy." Amen.

1. "Commentary on the Gospel of Saint Luke" by Saint Cyril Patriarch of Alexandria, Studion Publishers Inc., 1983, pages 418-419.