

SUNDAY OF THE HOLY FOREFATHERS
The Parable of the Great Banquet
“Many are called but few are chosen”
Luke 14:16-24

By Archpriest Peter Olsen
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“The Parable of the Great Banquet”, as with all of the parables of our Savior, is directed to all peoples and all nations of every epoch.

First of all, this parable was directed to the people of Israel, to whom the Lord had entrusted the knowledge about Himself. Specifically, this nation was called upon to meet our Savior when He came into the world. However, Christ was not accepted by the Israelites who, for the most part, rejected him.

Through Christ God made a New Covenant with all the people of all the nations, but not everyone completely accepted this covenant. Just like ancient Israel, *many were called, but few were chosen* (Luke 14:24). In Isaiah chapter 25 the prophet speaks about the great banquet, the great feast, to which we will all be invited. “Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.” The Great Banquet is right here in the Church. The Great Banquet is the Divine Liturgy. The great and holy meal that we partake of at the great banquet is the Holy Eucharist, the Body and Blood of our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ. Salvation, the Holy Eucharist, is there anything more important than these? It is very sad that many reject the New Covenant, either partially or fully. Some say that they accept the New Covenant but their actions say otherwise. For there are many today who imitate the people in the parable, who make excuses for why they cannot come to the banquet. I will not enumerate the many excuses that I have heard and continue to hear from folks who do not come to church and do not bring their children to church. If a person is gravely ill, can this person be healed on his own? Don’t the sick seek healing in hospitals and don’t the ill submit to the prescriptions and directives of physicians? If someone was dying from a grievous ailment, and there was a medication that could save his life, and it was only available in the hospital, wouldn’t it be sheer madness if he refused to go to the hospitable? What possible excuse could he offer to not go to the hospital and save his life? Perhaps the people who choose not to go church do not realize that they are sick and in need of healing. Perhaps they do not understand the great gift that is offered to them only here in the Church and no place else. Perhaps they do not understand that they and their children need this gift. Perhaps they do not know what salvation is and what it is that they are in need of being saved from.

Salvation, first of all, is deliverance from the power of evil and sin. Sin is to behave and act in a way that is contrary to our peace, health and well-being. You might say that sin is when a human being does not behave like a human being, but behaves contrary to our nature and essentially tries to be something other than *who and what we are*. When our Savior entered into the New Covenant with us during His Sermon on the Mount, He clearly outlined for us moral and ethical behavior. It was impossible for mankind to resist sin and evil on our own. Out of God’s infinite love for us, it was necessary for His Son to come into the world and to die for us on the Cross in order to open the way for healing and deliverance from sin and evil. “For the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23), not only spiritual death, but physical death as well. Jesus became incarnate in order to bring *life* back into the world (see “On the Incarnation” by St. Athanasius the Great). We are all sinners and we are all in need of God’s help to resist sin in order to live according to God’s commandments. We cannot do it on our own, and we certainly cannot do it if we do not come to church. Peace, well-being, love and health, spiritual and physical, are only attainable if we live according to God’s commandments, if we unite ourselves with Christ.

May we never forget that this parable is directed not only to the nations and to society, but to each and every one of us as well. The Lord calls every person to have faith and to live a life of good deeds. However, not everyone is chosen to partake of the Great Banquet with the Lord. Many who call themselves Christians refuse to live their lives and conduct themselves as Christians, and they do not listen to God's call to repent and to correct their lives.

Many modern Christians remember the Church and God only during a crisis. They appear in church confused and in a frenzy. They don't know what to do. They feel helpless and turn to and fro, not knowing which icon to look at, what prayer they should say, or even how to light a candle. They do not know that comforting grace of the Holy Spirit which is poured out on everyone who participates in the Divine Liturgy. The Lord invites everyone to this spiritual feast, but not everyone who is called is chosen.

Who are these chosen? Whether or not we are numbered among the chosen is up to us ourselves. It depends on how often we came to church, how often we went to Confession, and how often we partook of the Holy Mysteries of Christ. It depends on how often we sincerely prayed to God, and it depends on the degree to which our faith played a role in our daily lives. It depends upon the degree to which we are Christians not only in word but in deed. Amen.

(Based on a sermon by Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev)

