

## **The Eucharist is the Wedding Feast to Which We are All Called Sunday of the Holy Forefathers**

**By Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeyev, December 28, 2014**

In this parable of our Lord Jesus Christ about the calling to a banquet, the host invites the guests who, offering various excuses, turned down the invitation. Then the host of the banquet tells his servant: *“Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and maimed and blind and lame that my house may be filled”* (Luke 14:21,23). The servant did as his master instructed him.

This parable is about the people of Israel, for whom our Lord Jesus Christ came to proclaim the Kingdom of God. You see, when the Canaanite woman asked the Son of God to heal her daughter, *“He didn’t answer her a word”* (Matthew 15:23). When the disciples came to Him with the request that He send her away, He answered: *“I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel”* (Matthew 15:24). However, the leaders of God’s chosen people — the high priests, scribes and pharisees — rejected Christ and turned down the Divine invitation to the Kingdom of Heaven, remaining outside of it. The Son of God, Who was sent to a specific people — the Israelites — was not accepted by their majority.

Then the Lord directed his preaching to the gentiles. After His resurrection the apostles argued about where they should preach Christ: among the people of Israel or among the gentiles. The Apostle Paul definitively formed the declaration that the preaching of Jesus Christ should be not only for the circumcised, in other words, the people of Israel, but proclaimed to the entire world. You see, Christ told His disciples when He ascended into Heaven: *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit”* (Matthew 28:19). God’s favor, originally addressed only to the chosen people of God, was also passed on to others, for the Lord came in order to save all mankind. In this manner everyone was called who, being touched by the grace of God, occupied the seats at the Heavenly banquet which had been prepared for the Jews. The doors to the heavenly feast were opened to those who, perhaps, were not among those who were invited according to the original plan. In place of the old Israel came the new Israel, the Church of God, among whom, according to the words of the Apostle Paul, there is neither Greek nor Jew (Colossians 3:11), no distinction according to nationality or according to some other kind of characteristic, where the priesthood is not passed on by inheritance, contrary to the practice of the Old Testament, where only the son of a priest could become a priest. In the Church we are all *“a chosen race, a royal priesthood,”* according to the words of the Apostle Peter (1 Peter 2:9). Every person, worthy or unworthy, can become a member of the Church, if he has the desire to participate in the Divine banquet, the Divine wedding feast.

The Gospel parable of the calling to the banquet is, of course, directed to us. In the historical perspective, the people of Israel did not accept Christ, and in her place came the new Israel, of which we are the members. The Lord calls each of us to His wedding feast, but not everyone responds to this calling. When the Divine Liturgy is served in church, the doors to the wedding feast are opened to us, and not some kind of servant, but the Lord Himself calls us to His banquet, addressing us with the words: *“Take, eat; this is my Body”* (Matthew 26:26). His calling is directed to us, which was first heard by the apostles at the Mystical Supper: *“Drink of it, all of you; for this is my Blood of the New Covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins”* (Matthew 26:27-28), poured out for those who are present here, poured out for those who the Lord calls to His wedding feast.

Every time we hear these words, every time the Holy Chalice is lifted up by the priest who says: *“With the fear of God and with faith draw near”*, this invitation is for all of us who are here present. Entrance to this banquet is free and without cost. Necessary only is the desire to come and to unite with the Lord.

How many people, through their own or someone else's fault, or due to prevailing circumstances, are deprived of this benefit. They live not knowing that there exists such a banquet, a wedding feast, which is open daily to everyone, and not only on the great feasts. Every day the Divine Liturgy is served in the church, and everyone who desires can come and take delight in the feast of faith. Older and middle age generations of our parishioners remember the times when there were few churches, when in the large cities there was not even one church or there existed only a small church somewhere on the outskirts, to which it was not easy to find the way. In our times the way to the Church is open for everyone. Today the Word of God is proclaimed everywhere: not only from the church amvon, but by means of massive information, television and the internet. The apostolic preaching, which began two thousand years ago, continues today, and it is our task to respond to the invitation of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is addressed to each and every one of us.

Our task, our mission, also consists of the responsibility to call other people to the Divine banquet. Each of us is also called upon to be that servant who the host of the banquet sent out to the streets and lanes, in order to invite everyone to the feast. Everyone, whether he be priest or layman, man or woman, is called by God to apostolic service. The Lord desires that the grace which we receive in church would work through us on other people as well; that each of us would lead at least one other person into the Church and, if possible, even more.

The House of God will always be full of people who will come to the Church, regardless of circumstances or how the secular authorities view the Church. She will always be filled by those who are called, but each of us must ask himself the question: will we be among their number? Will also among their number be our neighbors, the members of our families and our coworkers?