

SERMON - PARABLE OF THE BANQUET, Luke 14:16-24, December 17, 2017

His Eminence, Archbishop Michael served as a parish priest for about 13 years. Under his leadership, he was privileged to see his parish grow from 60 to more than 130 members. He was criticized for attracting “undesirable” people to join the church. It occurred to Vladika that our Lord also attracted primarily what some people might call “undesirable.” Jesus spent most of His time with social outcasts, sinners, the ritually impure and the poor. For this Jesus was severely judged and criticized by the leaders of Judaism in His time. Aren’t all human beings created in the image and likeness of God? Isn’t that what defines a human being and isn’t that why all human beings deserve our love and respect? While Jesus hung dying on the Cross, didn’t He die for everyone, and didn’t He come to bring healing to everyone? Didn’t He pray to God the Father with His dying breath, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do”? Or should we define human beings by their social status, their education, the color of their skin, their ethnic origin, the amount of money or property that they own, or should we treat and accept all people with the same love, dignity and respect?

The United States of America was founded on the notion that all men were created equal and that all men have the right of freedom, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Indeed, it was because we were taxed so high and exploited by the British monarchy that our forefathers fought a bloody war of independence. It was in order to keep and preserve our beliefs in justice and equality that our American military men and women continue to fight and sacrifice their lives. It is rare that we get a glimpse into the private conversations of our elected officials, Presidents, politicians, the wealthy who wield powerful influence on government. When a former President of the United States died, his wife was interviewed and her conversation was recorded for posterity. I will not mention any names. But let us listen in to an excerpt from the reminiscence of a former First Lady about her husband and his experience as President of the United States: “...just an example of him having a heart—I can remember him being so disgusted, because once we had dinner with my mother and my stepfather, and there sat my stepfather putting a great slab of paté de foie gras on his toast and saying it was simply appalling to think that the minimum wage should be a dollar twenty-five. A...saying to me when we went home, ‘Do you realize that those laundrywomen in the South get sixty cents an hour?’ Or sixty cents a day, or whatever it was. And how horrified he was when he saw President X.....they were talking about the Cuban refugees...and X said, ‘Of course, they’d be so great if you could just ship a lot of them up in trucks from Miami and use ‘em as servants for twenty dollars a month, but I suppose somebody’d raise a fuss if you tried to do that.’ You know, again, so appalled at all these rich people just thinking of how you can live on — Not thinking how you can live just on twenty dollars a month, but just to use these people like slaves. He was just so hurt for them...and afriend of my stepfather said, ‘why don’t you get labor to do it? If you took a dollar a week out of all of labor’s wages, you could have the money raised in no time at all.’ And he was just really sickened by that and said, ‘Can you think what a dollar a week out of their wages would mean to all those people?’ So all those things show that he did have a heart, because he was really shocked by those things.”

In today’s Gospel the Lord invites the chosen people of God, the Hebrews, to sit at His banquet. In Holy Scripture, the Kingdom of Heaven is *par excellence* likened to a banquet. and the rightful heirs of the Kingdom refuse the invitation and offer lame excuses. Instead of the excuse of having bought oxen or a field, just one example of something we might say today is “Thank you for the invitation Lord, but I’m sorry, please excuse me because my son has soccer, or my daughter has basketball.” The Banquet is here and now. The altar table is the Lord’s Banquet. The Holy Eucharist is the Divine and Mystical nourishment with which the Lord’s Table is laden. The Lord bids us and invites *everyone* to be part of His Church and his salvation and to have a place at the Divine Banquet. The Kingdom of God is here and now — “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven.” The Kingdom of Heaven

transcends time and space and is beyond existence as we know it. We cannot fully enter the Banquet above if we refuse and do not participate in the Banquet below and to which the Lord bids and invites us. God and Church are eternal and “the one thing needful,” and yet God and the Church are considered expendable and secondary. Everything else that will perish in the end and turn to dust are given first priority and considered more important. The Lord becomes angry because those who are invited make excuses and refuse to come to the Banquet. The Lord directs his servants to go out and invite the poor, the maimed, the blind, and the lame, all those “undesirables” that the Hebrew leaders, the Pharisees, many politicians and even Church leaders consider to be chattel and something to be exploited, used, abused and taken advantage of. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. used to say that this is when we treat a fellow brother or sister human being as an “it” instead of as “he” or “she”.

The words spoken by the Lord at the end of today’s Gospel are very sobering. The Lord says, “For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet. For many are called, but few are chosen.” Everyone is called, but not everyone answers the call. Only those who are willing to freely cooperate with God are chosen. God chooses those who choose Him. Brothers and Sisters, may we always say “Yes” to the Lord’s invitation. May we be found worthy to have a seat at the Lord’s Banquet. May we Give thanks unto the Lord for His gracious kindness and love towards us. And finally, may we always remember that how we judge and treat our fellow human beings is how God will judge and treat us. Amen.