

**SERMON on the Parable of the Wedding Feast**  
**Matthew 22:2-14, Sunday, September 13, 2020**

**(Based on the sermons of Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeev)**

In Holy Scripture, the Kingdom of Heaven is often described as a great banquet, such as the wedding feast described in today's Gospel. Each and every one of us and all of mankind is invited to this great feast. It takes preparation and hard work in order to prepare a wedding feast, both by the host and by the guests. Perhaps the guests will purchase or rent special clothes to wear. Travel arrangements may have to be made, possibly airplane tickets need to be purchased and hotel reservations need to be made. A gift, usually monetary, will be given to the bride and groom. All of this takes dedication, time and self-sacrifice. It is the same thing when we choose to answer the call of God and His love which He offers to us. In order to cultivate a relationship with God, we must struggle to keep the commandments of God. Prayer is essential and cannot be neglected. We must keep a daily rule of prayer at home. Equally essential is weekly and regular attendance at the Divine services in church. No less important is frequently going to Confession and proper preparation of prayer and fasting in order to receive Holy Communion. Often there are roadblocks that may prevent us from coming to church or from saying our prayers or from going to Confession. Perhaps we neglect praying at home and perhaps we poorly try to keep the commandments of God. As a result coldness enters into us and our hearts become hard and callous. As a result, we can become lazy and negligent about going to church. Our Lord calls us every minute of our lives. Too often we reject His call with the excuse that we don't have time, that we are too occupied with our earthly cares and pleasures. Perhaps we are satisfied with our jobs, our families and our friends, and we feel that we have no need for God. Heaven may seem to us to be something abstract and far away -- but life on earth is right here at our feet. Perhaps we think that sometime later, maybe in old age, we will have time to think about heavenly things. For now, however, some of us would rather enjoy our earthly pleasures while we can and forget about God. Sometimes in my priesthood I have encountered people who have habitually neglected God in their lives, but when they experienced a crisis they came running to the church. These people usually have no foundation of faith. It is never too late to turn to God and to repent, even if the person is driven by a crisis of some sort, but very often, because of a weak or almost non-existent relationship with God, their turning to God is brief, motivated out of fear and panic, and I never see them again. When a person passes over into the next life, he stands alone face to face with God. The earthly cares and pleasures that consumed his time on earth no longer exist and are now a memory. If, during his earthly life he only accumulated earthly riches and possessions and left the treasury of his heart bereft of any spiritual wealth, then he will stand before the Lord naked, with empty hands and nothing to offer. He will not have on the wedding garment which is necessary to wear in order to participate in the heavenly wedding feast. He will no longer hear the Lord's invitation and call. Now it will be too late. Instead, to his horror, he will hear the Lord say "*Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth.*" "*Many are called, but few are chosen.*" When we hear these words of the Lord, we have to make a choice, whether or not to answer God's call. A place has been prepared for each and every one of us in the heavenly wedding feast of God's kingdom. If it turns out that we don't find ourselves seated at the wedding feast, it is our own fault because we did not answer God's call. Then, what our Lord spoke about will take place. Since it turned out that we were unworthy, someone else will be invited to take our place. The Lord's banquet, one way or another, will be filled with those who will be worthy to recline and feast sumptuously in the mansions of our heavenly Father. The question is, will we be among them? We make this choice every day, every hour and every minute of our lives while we still have breath in our mouths. In every concrete moment of our life and in every concrete situation we face a dilemma, which has so clearly been described in the Old Testament: "*I have offered you life or death, a blessing or a curse. Choose life, so that you and your descendants may live*" (2 Kings 30:19). Amen.

