

THE PARABLE OF THE WEDDING FEAST
“Unus Christianus — Nullus Christianus”
Matthew 22:2-14

By Archpriest Peter Olsen
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When we are baptized, we become an integral part of a sacred community, which we call the Church. The Church has aspects which resemble other organizations — a board of trustees, a legal incorporation, some sort of system in place for its members to render financial support, etc. Like other organizations, the existence of the Church is based on a purpose. Its members have goals and responsibilities. There is another aspect to the Church which no other organization on this earth has, no matter what its goals or purposes may be. The Church is transcendent. The Church is mystical and belongs to the heavenly and spiritual realm. The Church is part of the Kingdom of God — invisible to the naked eye, but visible to the spiritual eyes of the heart.

Once having met the requirements and having become a member of many organizations, all you need do to in order to retain your membership is to pay your yearly dues. You need not participate in meetings or other activities of the organization. Just pay your dues, and you are always considered to be a card carrying member. You are still permitted to participate in elections of officers, and when other items come before the organization which require a vote, you may still have your say so. It is not this way with the Church. When we are baptized, the priest places on us a pure white garment, which symbolizes our entrance into the mystical body of the community of believers. The white garment symbolizes our repentance and the washing away of our sins in the holy waters of baptism. It means that we will change our lives and live in a new way. After the newly-illuminated Orthodox Christian is baptized, the Church sings, “As many of you who have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ” (Gal. 3:27). Inasmuch as we have put on Christ, symbolized by our baptismal garment, the temptation and danger we face is to *put off Christ*, in which case our baptismal garment will be taken away from us, or better, it is *we ourselves* who take it off. This happens when we choose *not* to keep the promises and pledges that we have made. Merely keeping our financial pledge is not enough for us to keep our membership in the Church. It does not guarantee that we will be permitted to participate in parish meetings. It does not guarantee that we will be permitted to be married in the Church. It does not even guarantee that when we die it will be permitted for our funeral to be served in the Church. Terrible as it may sound, it means that we have forsaken Christ and that we are no longer Christians.

We may choose not to go to Confession and repent for our sins. We may choose not to try to be reconciled with those whom we may have offended, and to forgive those who may have offended us. We may choose not to say our prayers or to read the Holy Scriptures and the Lives of the Saints. We may choose not to try to keep the prescribed fasts of the Orthodox Church. We may choose not to always try to order our lives according to the commandments of God. We may choose not to give alms, to practice “mercy giving.” We may choose not to go to Church on Sunday, out of laziness or for some other unacceptable reason. The very word “Church,” or “Ekklesia” in Greek, means “an assembly or gathering.” The very word “Liturgy,” or “Leitourgia” in Greek, means “a common act of the people.” We may choose to not attend church and stay home, and still call ourselves Orthodox Christians. There is a Latin saying, “Unus Christianus — Nullus Christianus,” which means, “One Christian is no Christian.” Membership in the Church implies that we are part of the community of the Body of Christ. When we choose not to go to church and not to live the life of the Orthodox Christian, we are forsaking our membership in the Church.

I am not talking about people who are physically or medically unable to come to Church, such is what often happens when we reach old age. In that case, these faithful people will summon the priest who will visit them, hear their confessions, and give them Holy Communion.

In this case they fully retain their membership in the Church. The Blood of Christ flowing through our veins makes us brothers and sisters in Christ, a spiritual family who are members of the community of believers.

The King in today's parable is God Himself. The wedding feast is the Church, which is part of the Kingdom of God. We are all invited to participate in the wedding feast and to sit at the heavenly banquet. We are required to wear a wedding garment, which is our Baptismal garment. If we shirk our responsibilities as Orthodox Christians, we are removing our wedding garment, and the King will say to us, "Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?" Then we will hear the King utter those terrible words to his servants, "Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 22:13). The holy Apostle Paul tells us that we must have in us the same mind which is in Christ Jesus (Philippians 2:5). St. Paul exhorts us to share the common vision and mindset of Christ. The mindset of Christ, the Bridegroom, is reflected in the Church, which is His Bride. The mindset of both are one and the same. Let us share this same mind which is in Christ, and let us live accordingly. Let us respond in a positive way to the Lord's invitation to the wedding feast, and may we be found worthy, unworthy as we are, to forever be partakers of the heavenly banquet, to the glory of God the Father, His Only-Begotten Son our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the power and grace of the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

