

Date: September 12, 2020

Subject: 14th Sunday After Pentecost

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

My prayers for all of you on the West Coast who not only have to live through the restrictions of the virus, but now also have to deal with the raging fires and breathing all the smoke. May God have mercy!

MATTHEW 21: 1-14

*And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said,
The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son,
And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come.
Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my
dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage.
But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise:
And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them.
But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those
murderers, and burned up their city.
Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy.
Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage.
So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad
and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests.
And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment:
And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was
speechless.
Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer
darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.
For many are called, but few are chosen.*

The last sentence of this Scriptural passage is very sobering. *For many are called, but few are chosen.* In our worldly understanding, we believe in the adage, “the more the better”. But we are warned here that that is not what will happen when the Lord returns back to earth to judge who will be worthy of salvation, described here as participation in the Son’s wedding. All people are invited to attend. But only a few will be allowed in because they will be the only ones wearing the “wedding garment”.

It behooves us to contemplate why this will happen, to insure as best as we can that we be among the few accepted guests, and not among that crowd that will be *cast into outer darkness*, where eternally *there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth*. The important question then is to understand what is the “wedding garment”, and why it is so crucial that participation in this wedding is proscribed for those without it?

Archbishop Nikon, the archbishop of my youth, describes this in a sermon in this way: This garment was made of the materials of that which Jesus wore during His Transfiguration. This garment made Him appear to be whiter than snow and brighter than the sun. The Mother of God wears this kind of garment, which was sewn together by the deeds of Her sinless life. St. Seraphim was wearing it in his winter discussion with a man named Motovilov, who was unable to look at St. Seraphim because of the overwhelming light that was emanating from him. All saints sew this garment for themselves, stitch by stitch, during their lives, with their holy acts. What the wedding garment then is, is the acquisition of Grace of the Holy Spirit from the performance of holiness.

Each and every Orthodox Christian is gifted this garment through the waters of baptism. A symbol of it is the the baptismal gown that one is dressed in right after his baptism. Yes, we receive this garment as a free gift from God when we are baptized. The tragedy, though, is that we do not retain it in the pure condition that we receive it.

During our life, we continually dirty it and tear it, bit by bit, string by string, piece by piece, until it becomes a dirty rag. We do this through the sins that we commit during our sinful life. This was why the rejected guest in this parable was silent in his response before the Host. He could not justify himself, because he had destroyed his garment and never bothered to salvage it through repentance, to renew it and keep it in a pristine condition.

The same fate awaits most people when the day of the “wedding” happens. This fate can also befall us if we delay in laundering again and again our baptismal garment, and trying to maintain it in a pure condition. The day that the “wedding” will start is a mystery. But when it does, and we are called called to the “wedding”, our baptismal gift will become our “wedding garment”. Its condition will determine if we will be allowed to participate in the celebration, or *will be cast into outer darkness*.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, our God is a merciful and loving God, Who approached the man not dressed in the wedding garment and called called him, “friend”. Our Savior continually approaches us in the same manner as a means of reminding us of our need to repent. If each time that He approaches us and we bow down before Him in repentance, He will not need to expel us from His wedding. He will call His servants (the angels) to help us restore our garment to a pure condition before that day of His wedding. But if we don’t, we too will be silent, unable to justify ourselves when we approach Him at the start of His celebration. Then we too will be *cast into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth*. Therefore, let us not procrastinate!

With Much Love in Christ,
Archpriest Serge Kotar