

Date: September 9, 2023

Subject: 14th Sunday After Pentecost

My Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

Please accept my apologies for not writing to you the past two weeks. The weekends of those weeks were incredibly busy, and I just ran out of steam. I will also miss a week at the end of this month as I will be flying to Seattle for my niece's wedding.

MATTHEW 22: 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 certain king in this parable is, of course, God, who calls people to come to the wedding of His Son, Jesus Christ. The invitation is God's call to **all** people to salvation. The King actually made two calls. The first one was to the members of His Chosen Nation, Israel, who were constantly straying from Him by their wayward manner of living. He sent His servants, the prophets, to call them to repentance and to warn them of His wrath if they would not repent. But most of them did not respond to His call. *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.* God then even sent His only Begotten-Son, the Bridegroom, to reason with them, but they also rejected Him and murdered Him in a most painful and degrading way. They crucified Him. The King, naturally, *was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city, Jerusalem.*

Since the number of people who accepted the King's invitation was very limited, He made a second call through new servants, the apostles. *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.* This second call reveals with absolute certainty that God truly wants everyone to be saved. His great love and mercy are confirmed in the parable. *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.*

The last sentence of this Gospel passage, *for many are called, but few are chosen*, is a very important one for us. It warns us that we need to ensure that we are not only called, but also chosen. The good news for us is that we, Orthodox Christians, have already been both called and chosen. This was done when we were baptized. But there is also the possibility of bad news for us that we must not overlook. Anyone who had already been chosen could still be rejected in the end, based how he lived after he had been chosen. If he does not live correctly, he will be cast out. This is what happened to the guest who came to the celebration not wearing his wedding garment.

What then is this wedding garment? It represents the condition of spiritual purity that a person gains through grace by living righteously. We first attained this condition through our baptism, our spiritual birth, the symbol of which is the pure white gown that we were dressed in upon exiting the baptismal font. We are expected to preserve this spiritual purity throughout our life on earth, according to the vows that we gave at our baptism. But we have a strong inclination to sin, and we sin often. Each sin dilutes our spiritual purity and soils our garment. Fortunately, the Lord knows our weaknesses and mercifully gives us the means to restore our garment to its original, pure state. This is done through sacraments, enabling us to truly repent and change our life. If we do, then we are walking correctly down the path leading to the wedding hall, and we will be allowed to enter into it. There, we will live united with Christ, the Royal Bridegroom, in a blessed and eternal union.

Sadly, many people are often so satisfied with their sinful life on earth that they either do not hear or simply ignore God's call. We saw such a person in the Gospel reading two Sundays ago where a rich youth approached the Savior to ask what he needed to be do in order to achieve salvation. When Christ revealed that he needed to make a choice between his wealth and following the Savior, the man chose his wealth over the Savior. We also saw a whole village of people, the Gadarenes, who chose ill-gotten revenue from raising pigs over the salvation that the Savior came to offer them. People will even resist and kill in order to to preserve their earthly interests, as did the Jewish leaders who murdered the very Savior Who was promised to mankind after the original fall into sin by our first ancestors, Adam and Eve. This kind of resistance and murder are discussed above in this parable. Through such choices, people choose to remain outside the wedding hall. They eternally separate themselves from the Bridegroom and wind up *being cast into outer darkness*. Their eternity, therefore, will not be a blessed one. It will be an eternity spent in *weeping and gnashing of teeth*.

My dear brothers and sisters, God gave us this parable to inspire us to continually examine our wedding garment. Chances are that we will find many spots soiling it. We know what we must do. May God strengthen our will to, indeed, continually renew it. A great reward awaits us if we do.

With Much Love in Christ,
Archpriest Serge Kotar