

This morning we hear our Lord's parable of a wedding. The parable is told as a word about the kingdom of heaven-the parable begins, "the kingdom of heaven is like..." (v2). This image Christ uses in the parable becomes one of the most prominent images for the kingdom of heaven in all of Scripture. The wedding of a Son to His Bride. A beautiful image used extensively in the Church to illustrate the joining of Christ with His Holy Church, the Head with the Body, the Bride with the Bridegroom. "Behold the Bridegroom cometh in the middle of night," we sing in Great Lent. We also have the parable of the wise and the foolish virgins waiting for the Bridegroom. St. Paul uses the image of marriage for our relationship with Christ and the kingdom on several occasions.

This image is so ideal because it helps express to us the potential intimacy of man's relationship with His God. And even this simile of marriage is but a pale image of the reality of Christ's union with His people. In the wedding service, we quote the Scriptures, "and the two become one flesh." This is the image given of the kingdom of heaven; we're to be joined to Christ even more fully than a Bride to her Bridegroom.

So in the parable, the Father has prepared for His Son a wedding, and the Father sends out servants to invite people to attend this great occasion. He sends out servants with invitations not just one time, but three times, and He's even forced to send out the army to punish those who have mistreated some of those servants. To understand this persistency we skip to the last verse of the parable-"for many are called, but few are chosen" (v. 14). The Father has made provision for the Church to be the Bride of Christ. And many are called to the wedding-the Orthodox Study Bible has a footnote that explains that the phrase "for many" is an Aramaic expression meaning "for all." Our Orthodox understanding here is that the Church is established, and all mankind is called to be a part of the Body and Bride of God. God desires that "all men be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4). So the repeated sending out of servants to call guests to the wedding shows the Father's desire to have His people with Him in the Heavenly Kingdom (the whole parable is told to demonstrate this). God loves us, and wants us for His own.

So the King has sent out three waves of servants with invitations, and the responses are varied. The first group of servants are simply ignored, the invited are not willing to come. The second group of servants are mocked, and some of the invited just leave and go back to their business, and others take the servants and abuse them and even kill them. The final group is sent to a different audience-instead of a select few being invited to the wedding, these servants are sent on the highways to invite anyone they might see. And finally, the wedding hall is filled with guests.

When the Fathers comment on these three groups of servants, they immediately see the stages of God's dealing with mankind. The first group represents Moses and the law, who the Jews

essentially ignore (since their lives aren't transformed by God through the following of the law). The second group represents the prophets, also sent to the people of Israel. The prophets were beaten and abused and killed-the messengers sent from God to man were again not heeded. Finally Christ Himself is incarnate, and the third group is sent out-the Apostles are sent to share the Gospel of God's salvation with all mankind (no longer only the Jews).

We find ourselves, obviously, to be in the final group. But even among those who respond to the King with this final invitation, we end with a warning, as many of Christ's parables do. *“But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness’*” (vv. 11-13). The king has called everyone, but even then, to attend, there are expectations! The guests are expected to be properly attired.

This one man had not worn his wedding garment. The Father's tell us this lapse is so terrible because the Host/the King had provided the wedding garments for his guests to wear. He has no excuse for not be dressed and ready for the wedding. The wedding garment is our baptismal robe, and all that goes with it. The purity of our lives, having died to the old man and being clothed in the new man, being clothed in Christ. Once we say “yes” to Christ, there are expectations. If you love Me, Christ says, keep My commandments. We're expected not to just continue doing whatever we want to do, but we're expected to take up our Cross and follow Christ wherever He may lead us. If we just keep doing whatever we want, if we're still the master in our lives, then we'll be just like this man who arrived at the wedding but didn't have his wedding garment. It would be a horrible thing to discover that the invitation was open to all (as it is), but that we had not prepared ourselves to be welcomed into the heavenly kingdom.

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!