

**TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, NOVEMBER 26/DECEMBER 9,  
2007**

**COL 3: 4-11**

**ST. LUKE 14: 16-24**

by

Fr. Dr. Photios+ (W)

**Gospel:** *Then said He unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many:*

*And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready.*

*And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused.*

*And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused.*

*And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.*

*So that servant came, and shewed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to the servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind.*

*And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room.*

*And the lord said unto the servant. Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.*

*For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.*

...

A just man who chooses evil will be punished, while a sinner who is converted to righteousness will obtain salvation. [*The Gospel Commentary, Our Father Among the Saints, John Chrysostom, p. 544.*]

Consider the setting for today's Gospel: Jesus is still in the house of the chief Pharisees to eat bread on the Sabbath. He went into their houses because He wished to "bring benefit to their souls".<sup>1</sup> Christ teaches through this parable to bring home to the man sitting at the table with Him what a feast with God means. The Lord reacted to a man's comment "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God."<sup>2</sup> This man had misunderstood Christ's teaching. He didn't understand the spiritual things He had been saying because he was a "natural man" and not spiritual, anything beyond the senses was foreign to him. He was "governed by human reasonings"<sup>3</sup> and believed and understood everything in terms of "physical nature".<sup>4</sup>

He lived according to nature but could not bring himself to live *above* it. He would not put himself in harm's way or be badly treated "for the sake of the good".<sup>5</sup> His approach to life was neutral – he didn't want to hurt anyone, or be hurt.<sup>6</sup> This man at the dinner, upon hearing the Lord, "thought that God will reward with hospitality and will make feasts for the *righteous* with *material* food (emphases supplied)". This is what he meant when he said "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God."<sup>7</sup>

The Lord speaks to us today in a parable as prophesied by Saint David: "I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter dark sayings which have been from the beginning."<sup>8</sup> Why does the Lord use the parable so much as His teaching vehicle? The Fathers explain:

Men pay closer attention to things spoken obscurely and in parables; such things they examine and investigate, whereas they do not listen so carefully to what is said plainly and clearly, and do not apply themselves to it in earnest; for this reason Christ spoke in parables. Parables use the (obvious) meaning to words as a cover; they are images and symbols of invisible things, of intellectual and spiritual (realities). What we cannot see with our bodily eyes (Christ) shows us in a parable.<sup>9</sup>

The Setting –

A certain man – By a "certain man" is meant God the Father. Whenever Holy Scripture alludes to God's love for man, he is represented as a man. This is appropriate because God loves man. So in the parable, Jesus calls God "man".<sup>10</sup>

The Great Supper – means "the divine economy of the Incarnation which He worked in us, making us sharers of the Flesh of His Son".<sup>11</sup> The term supper, is used because the Lord came in the last days, "at the evening of this age".<sup>12</sup> The supper is *great* because our salvation is a great mystery.<sup>13</sup>

The Servant – "And He sent His servant at supper time."

The Lord particularized the servant. It wasn't any servant - it was His servant! Who did God send? His Son, of course. His servant is Christ. Being perfect, thus sinless, He is the sole true servant of God.<sup>14</sup> God the Father's servant was "well-pleasing" to Him, not only as God the Son, but as man; "for He alone was sinless; He performed all the counsels and desires of God the Father, and He fulfilled all righteousness".<sup>15</sup>

At Supper Time – God sends Christ at suppertime, meaning “at the appointed and appropriate time”. This time was during the reign of Caesar Augustus, when evil had reached its zenith. Thus, it was an opportune time for the Great Healer to spiritually medicate society and through His holy life heal “every form of iniquity”.<sup>16</sup>

When is Supper Ready? - Christ, the servant, calls for the Jews to “Come, for all things are now ready.” The joyful message is that all they need to do is come, accept Me and be saved:

And He said, Come; for all things are now ready. For in Christ Jesus God the Father had prepared those ineffable good things which He bestows upon the world: the renunciation and remission of sins, the communion and reception of the Holy Spirit, adoption, purity, beauty, righteousness, sanctification, redemption, the kingdom of heaven and liberation from the torments (of hell).<sup>17</sup>

The leaders of the Jews then began to make excuses for not following Christ, not accepting Him as the Messiah.<sup>18</sup> All the Jewish leaders<sup>19</sup> were found unworthy of the supper because they rejected Him.

The man who bought the piece of ground and ‘begged off’ to go look after it signifies two things: (1) love of money and wealth and (2) recognition of only nature, not being able to see beyond or accept what is not nature, I.e., not being able to see the spiritual, e.g., the Virgin Birth.<sup>20</sup>

Piece of Ground – The piece of ground represents the world and nature to the exclusion of the spiritual.<sup>21</sup>

The man who bought the five yoke of oxen also signifies loving wealth and money. He only “loves the *material* (emphasis supplied) world” and is concerned with this world not the next.<sup>22</sup> The third man who invoked his marriage as the excuse “is a lover of pleasure who has devoted himself to the flesh, the mate of the soul. By cleaving to the flesh, he cannot please God”.<sup>23</sup>

Bl. Theophylact also allows us to understand these matters “literally”:

We also fall away from God because of fields, because of yokes of oxen, because of marriages, where we become *so attached* (emphasis supplied) to them that they consume our whole life and we are carried away even to the point of shedding blood over them. Then there is no divine thought or word that we can practice or comprehend.<sup>24</sup>

I.e., we attach ourselves to the pursuit or acquisition of things, non-spiritual objects, thus we are deviated from following Christ:

The true good of a rational soul is to know, to understand, and to take delight in God’s laws and in good spiritual knowledge. For such things should we strive and struggle.<sup>25</sup>

“So that servant came...” The servant (Christ) relays to His Father (the master of the house) the rejection of Him by the “students of the law and scribes”.<sup>26</sup> These fell from grace. The master orders His servant to go out quickly and bring in “the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind”. There was still room, so God poured out His goodness on the Gentiles. They were in “the highways and hedges” and were strangers to His covenants.

The simple among the Jews were likened “to the halt, the blind, and the maimed”. God called the “foolish of this world, the lowly”- it was the multitude who marveled at Jesus’ words of grace and teaching. After the lowly of Jews had come to Him, He sought out the sinners from outside the Jews, the Gentiles. They

were to be found in the hedges, that is, in sins. For sin is a great hedge and middle wall which separates us from God. By *highways* He signifies the Gentiles’ course of life, which led them to so many false beliefs. By *hedges* he signifies their life of sins.<sup>27</sup>

Compulsion - At the end of the parable, the master doesn’t *literally* compel the Gentiles to come in. Rather, as the Fathers relate, we should remember each of us is *free* to believe in Christ, or not. Compel doesn’t have its usual meaning here. Compel is used “to teach us that it is a sign of God’s great power that the Gentiles, who were in such ignorance, came to believe”. Compel emphasizes the power of the preaching that ‘compelled’ them to change their idolatrous ways and come to Christ.<sup>28</sup>

The Spiritual Supper - Everyday Christ prepares our spiritual supper, granting the kingdom of heaven to the poor and maimed, understood not in a physical, but spiritual, sense: to the poor “who have fallen away from the glory”... and to the maimed “who cannot show forth in themselves a blameless life” – both classes of sinners! Through sending His Son, He invites these sinners to His Spiritual Supper because he “came not to call the righteous, but sinners”.<sup>29</sup>

We can understand this parable in a simpler fashion, the rich and crippled are to be favoured as against the rich. We are to be hospitable to the poor and generous in welcoming our brethren even if they are recalcitrant to come. We are to “teach what is necessary, even if the students are unwilling”.<sup>30</sup>

Our spiritual supper is ready. Christ welcomes us, urges us to, simply, come to it. We are to come unattached. If we don’t choose to come, we shall not taste His supper. For “none of these men which were called [and didn’t come] shall taste of My supper”.<sup>31</sup>

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> St. Luke 14: 1-6.

<sup>2</sup> *id.*, 14: 12-15 and see Bl. Theophylact's *Explanation of the Holy Gospel According to Luke, Vol. III* in the series, Bl. Theophylact's *Explanation of the New Testament* (tr. from the original Greek by Fr. Christopher Stade), Chrysostom press, House Springs, MO, 1997, p. 181.

<sup>3</sup> *id.*

<sup>4</sup> *id.*

<sup>5</sup> *id.*, pp. 181-182.

<sup>6</sup> *id.*, p. 181.

<sup>7</sup> *id.*

<sup>8</sup> Hieromonk German Ciuba (tr. from the Slavonic into English; tr. from the Greek into Slavonic in the year 6851, A.D. 1343), *The Gospel Commentary*, Russian Orthodox Church of the Nativity of Christ (Old Rite), Erie, PA, 2002, p. 537.

<sup>9</sup> *id.*

<sup>10</sup> Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 182.

<sup>11</sup> *id.*

<sup>12</sup> *id.*

<sup>13</sup> *id.*

<sup>14</sup> *id.*, pp. 182-183.

<sup>15</sup> Ciuba, *op. cit.*, p. 538.

<sup>16</sup> Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

<sup>17</sup> Ciuba, *op. cit.*, p. 539.

<sup>18</sup> Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, pp. 183-184.

<sup>19</sup> "leaders of the Jews, scribes and Pharisees," Ciuba, *op. cit.*, p. 539.

<sup>20</sup> Ciuba, *id.*, pp. 539-540, and Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, pp. 183-184.

<sup>21</sup> *id.*, p. 184.

<sup>22</sup> *id.*

<sup>23</sup> *id.* and see Ciuba, *op. cit.*, pp. 539-540.

<sup>24</sup> Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

<sup>25</sup> Ciuba, *op. cit.*, p. 540.

<sup>26</sup> Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

<sup>27</sup> *id.*

<sup>28</sup> *id.*, pp. 185-186 and see Ciuba, *op. cit.*, pp. 542-543.

<sup>29</sup> Ciuba, *id.*, p. 544 and Bl. Theophylact, *op. cit.*, pp. 185-186.

<sup>30</sup> *id.*

<sup>31</sup> *id.*, p. 185.