



Evangelion

A Bulletin of Orthodox Christian Faith

15 December 2013

The Invitation of God

Today we hear Saint Luke's account of the parable of the great banquet. Jesus Christ recounts how a man gave a great feast to which many people were invited. However, they did not respond to His invitation, excusing themselves for a variety of reasons. In response, the master of the house instructed his servants to go out into the streets and assemble the poor and crippled to take their place.

The Scriptures use the image of a banquet as a symbol of the Kingdom of God, and the Church Fathers understood this parable as referring to the coming of Christ in the flesh which we are preparing to celebrate this Nativity. By the marriage of Christ's human and divine natures we have been given access to His divine life. For centuries God had been preparing the people of Israel to receive Christ, but, when the Jews rejected Jesus, the Gospel was to be preached to the Gentiles and all were given the chance to respond to Jesus Christ.

This parable is also a warning to us in our complacency. The people who failed to respond to the invitation to the banquet were not bad people, nor were they doing bad things. Their excuses for not attending the feast can sound quite legitimate. We need to be careful that the normal cares of life do not so overwhelm us that they prevent us from seeing what is really going on. For the ultimate tragedy in this account is not simply that people rejected God's revelation, but that they failed to see what it was that they were rejecting. As we await the coming of Christ we need to be vigilant that the cares of life do not overwhelm us and that we may be given the gift of sight to recognize Christ at the many moments that He comes into our lives.



The man who cries out against evil men but does not pray for them
will never know the grace of God.

Saint Silouan the Athonite

The Lord Himself will teach us how to pray. We won't learn prayer on our own, nor will anyone else teach us it. Don't let us say to ourselves, 'I have made such-and-such a number of prostrations, so now I have secured divine grace,' but rather let us make entreaty for the pure light of divine knowledge to shine within us and open our spiritual eyes so that we may understand His divine words. In this way, without realizing it, we love God without contorting ourselves and without exertion and struggle. What is difficult for man is easy for God. We will love God suddenly when grace overshadows us. If we love Christ very much, the prayer will say itself. Christ will be continually in our mind and in our heart.

Saint Porphyrios the Kapsokalivite

**Sunday 15 December 2013 is
the Eleventh Sunday of Luke**

Matins Gospel: Mark 16:9-20

Epistle: 2 Timothy 1:8-18

Gospel: Luke 14:16-24;
Matthew 22:14

Resurrectional Apolytikion:

You came down from above, O
Compassionate, you accepted
burial for three days, that you
might free us from the passions.
Our life and resurrection, Lord,
glory to you!

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Readings and saints for this week:

Monday: 1 Timothy 1:1-7; Mark 9:42-50; 10:1
Prophet Haggai; Modestos, Bp. of Jerusalem

Tuesday: Hebrews 11:33-40; 12:1-2; Luke 11:47-54; 12:1
Prophet Daniel; Dionysios of Zakyntos

Wednesday: 1 Timothy 1:18-20; 2:8-15; Mark 10:11-16
Martyrs Sebastian & Companions; Michael the Confessor

Thursday: 1 Timothy 3:1-13; Mark 10:17-27
Martyrs Boniface & Companions; Gregentius of Ethiopia

Friday: Hebrews 10:32-38; Mark 9:33-41
Forefeast of the Nativity; Ignatius the God-Bearer

Saturday: Galatians 3:8-12; Luke 13:19-29
Forefeast of the Nativity; Martyr Juliana of Nicomedia

A Mercy of Peace, a Sacrifice of Praise

An introduction to the Divine Liturgy (continued)

We have seen that the confession of our faith in the Creed is what allows us to participate in the sacrifice of the Eucharist in the second part of the Divine Liturgy. By confessing the Creed, we show where we have placed our trust and unite ourselves to Christ's Body, the Church.

This faith is rooted in the love of God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit and exists in a communion of love from all eternity. But this love of God has also reached out to us human beings.



And in One Lord, Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ is the eternal Word of God and Second Person of the Holy Trinity. Saint John's Gospel tells us that He was with God and was God from the beginning and that everything was made through Him. (1:1-3) In the Creed we confess that He is

Light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, consubstantial with the Father, through Him all things were made.

But we then continue to confess that:

For our sake and for our salvation, he came down from heaven, and was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became man.

This belief in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ is at the heart of our faith and distinguishes Christianity from all other religions. We do not simply believe that Jesus was a good man or a prophet, but we believe that He is God Himself and that in Him God was reconciling the world to Himself. (2 Corinthians 5:19) The Second Person of the Holy Trinity took our nature upon Himself, uniting it to His divine nature. And He did this out of love for us and in order to open the way to salvation for us.

As Orthodox Christians, we believe that human beings were created in God's image. God created us out of love and wanted us to love Him. But only free beings can love and so God created us with freedom and we used this freedom to move away from God. Through the entrance of sin and death into the world, the image of God in us became corrupted and tarnished and we were no longer free to respond to Him.

Because we were no longer able to attain the likeness of God, God reached out to us and in the Person of Jesus Christ. He became one of us, taking on our nature in order to renew it from within by uniting it to His divine nature. Christ became man in order to reach out to fallen humanity and restore our relationship with God.

Whom have we, Lord, like you –

The Great One who became small, the Wakeful who slept,
The Pure One who was baptized, the Living One who died,
The King who abased Himself to ensure honour for all.

Blessed is your honour!

Saint Ephrem the Syrian

Life begins and ends with these two qualities. Faith is the beginning, and love is the end; and the union of the two together is God. All that makes for a soul's perfection follows in their train, for nobody who professes faith will commit sin, and nobody who possesses love can feel hatred. As the tree is known by its fruits, so they who claim to belong to Christ are known by their actions; for this work of ours does not consist in just making professions, but in a faith that is both practical and lasting.

Saint Ignatius the God-Bearer, whom we commemorate on Friday

Preparing for the Saviour: The Ancestors of Christ

Today, on the second Sunday before Christmas, the Church commemorates Christ's forefathers according to the flesh, those righteous men and women who lived under the Old covenant, and foretold and longed for the coming of the Saviour. This includes those who lived before the giving of the Law, notably the patriarch Abraham, as well as the many prophets and righteous ones who witnessed to God's revelation to the people of Israel and called His people to return to Him when they strayed into error.

The Church understands the events that are recounted in the Old Testament as one long preparation for the coming of Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament we see how God was preparing a people who would be able to receive His Son, and the birth of the Holy Theotokos, as we saw last week, is the final moment of this long work of preparation.

The holy men and women whom we remember today longed to see the coming of Christ. We are truly blessed, for we live in the Christian age that has come about through the coming of Christ. Yet we also need to identify with their longing. Although Jesus Christ has come to us and has inaugurated a new age through His birth, death and resurrection, we also wait in hope for the Lord to come again and to bring to completion all that He has accomplished. In this time of preparing for the birth of Christ, we can examine our lives and ask ourselves what it is that we truly long for.



Come, let us faithfully celebrate the annual commemoration of Abraham and those who are with him, the fathers that lived before the Law. Let us honour the tribe of Judah as it meets; let us praise the youths in Babylon, who, as an image of the Trinity, quenched the flame of the furnace, together with Daniel; and holding fast to the prophecies of the prophets, let us cry aloud with Isaiah: "Behold, a Virgin shall conceive in her womb, and shall bear a Son, Emmanuel, God with us."

Matins of the Sunday of the Ancestors of Christ