

## COME

In today's reading from the Holy Gospel (Luke 14: 16-24), our Saviour presents a parable to the Pharisees, which is instructive for each of us:

Jesus replied: "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.' "But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.' "Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.' "Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.' "The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.' "'Sir,' the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.' "Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full. <sup>24</sup>I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.'"

This extraordinary invitation, this calling, 'Come, for everything is now ready', is also offered to all Orthodox Christians.. For, since the Incarnation of Christ, His Passion, His desolation of the gates of Hades, and His Glorious Resurrection... 'everything is now ready'. What is this banquet? It is Christ Himself, His salvific Body and Blood!

In an earlier parable, a woman stricken with a terrible and painful physical malady, perseveres and comes to the temple, demonstrating her faith and tenacity amidst great trials:

And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself. And when Jesus saw her, he called her to him, and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. And he laid his hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God. (Luke 13: 11-13)

Our Saviour "called her to him". She was healed by His touch, the conduit of Grace and divine condescension and love! Our Saviour, Who desires meeting us in His Church, also offers us His salvific and healing "touch", through worthy communing of His Body and Blood!

The parable highlights the tragic examples of the original invitees who seem to have better, or more important, things to do. Being bound to material needs, and even relationships, appears to supersede

the importance of God's invitation, (which is for our good, not His satisfaction). Our Saviour warns about misguided priorities and further cautions us about attempting to heed His call and come to Him without carrying one's cross:

He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that refuses to take up his cross to follow me is not worthy of me (Matthew 10: 37-38).

Life has become so busy, demanding and complex. We are constantly shifting personal priorities, adjusting to changing circumstances and shifting landscapes. We apply much of our energies, time and talents towards improving the quality of our lives, or at least maintaining the status quo. But our Saviour reminds us about the true "life", namely, eternal life:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no **life** in you (John 6:53).

But yet, we still prioritize the temporal over the eternal, material and sensorial needs over the needs of the soul, life in the world over eternal life.

Holy Scripture provides us with a striking example of Martha, who was so diligent and responsible, in contrast to her sister, who Martha considered negligent. Martha was scurrying about accommodating the needs of a household of guests, while her sister Maria sat at Jesus' feet, remaining bound to Him. Martha, exasperated and frustrated, complains to our Saviour:

But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her (Luke 10: 41-43).

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ. Let us be heedful to our Saviour's calling, putting God first in our lives, and worthily receive His salvific and healing touch, through Holy Communion. Let us continually embrace the "one thing needful" and endeavor to always seek **FIRST** the kingdom of God (Matthew 6:33)!