



My Beloved Ones,

In this Sunday's Gospel, our Church offers an important lesson concerning those who hear and obey the Word of God.

The Lord said this parable: "A man once gave a great banquet, and invited many; and at the time of the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, 'Come; for all is now ready.' But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a field, and I go out and see it; I pray you, have me excused.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I must go to examine them; I pray you, have me excused.' And another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' So the servant came and reported this to his master. Then the householder in anger said to his servant, 'Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and maimed and

blind and lame.' And the servant said, 'Sir, what you commanded has been done, and there is still room.' And the master said to the servant, 'Go out to the highways and hedges, and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet. For many are called, but few are chosen.'" (Luke 14: 16-24)

Truly, it is fitting that we hear this parable, because “[o]n the Sunday that occurs on or immediately after the eleventh of this month, we commemorate Christ's forefathers according to the flesh, both those that came before the Law, and those that lived after the giving of the Law.” As we prepare to celebrate the great banquet that is the Nativity, we are mindful of the many individuals who heeded God's Word. Abraham, for example, was called to leave the land of his fathers, but he trusted in God; and for his trust, God promised Abraham that *"In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed"* (Gen. 22:18).

Consider that when our Lord speaks this parable, He Himself has been called to dine at the home of Pharisee. *He said also to the man who had invited him, "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just."* When one of those who reclined at table with him heard these things, he said to him, *"Blessed is everyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!"* (Luke 14:12-15) Of course, the man who offered this response meant that those Israelites will be blessed, because he did not understand our Lord's commandment to show mercy, hospitality, and charity to those in need. Our Lord knew that this man felt secure, and so used the parable to show that yes, God calls all men, but few are chosen.

Forgetting the discussion of Gentile and Jew, we need to understand that this parable is about us. During this time of year, when worldly celebrations and planning draw our attention those who refused the Master offered many excuses: whether it was because of work, or the purchase of material things, like oxen. The last man even refused because he would prefer to spend time with his new family. Understand, our Lord does not criticize these things alone. A new family is not negative—but anything that draws us away from heavenly contemplation is negative. Those who refused the invitation probably felt they were one of God’s chosen faithful, but they allowed themselves to be distracted by materialism, and lost their places at the banquet.

My beloved ones, as we prepare to celebrate our Lord’s Nativity let us challenge ourselves to follow our Lord’s example. Let us seek to uplift the lives of those who really need it. Our Lord, after all, did not appear in the likeness of a conquering King, but instead took on the flesh of a poor child. He came to us to bear our weaknesses because He loved us, and wanted to lift up the poor and suffering.

If we are to truly remain worthy of having a place at the Master’s banquet, then like those righteous forefathers of Christ, we must keep our eyes on those things which really matter: clothing the naked, feeding the hungry, and comforting the sick and sorrowful. Only then, will we truly be worthy to join in the glory of this blessed season.

+ALEXIOS

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