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THE PARABLE OF THE GREAT SUPPER

The cause and the purpose of the parable

One Sabbath the Lord went to the home of a certain Pharisee nobleman, to dine with him. Quite a few lawyers and Pharisees were also invited to the meal. The Lord, according to His custom, was teaching and counseling them. Among other things He was advising them that when they have a meal or a supper they should prefer to invite the poor and the lame, so that they can be truly blessed, because they are not able to pay it back to them. He will pay back this benefaction of theirs at the resurrection of the righteous ones.

When one of those dining with Him heard this saying, he answered back to the Lord that truly blessed is whoever will eat bread in the Kingdom of God. This saying of his, aside from the fact that it betrays the materialistic train of thought of the Pharisees, comprises, as St. Nektarios notes, a sideways disapproval of the words of the Lord. While the Lord was blessing charity and selflessness, the Pharisees considered blessed those Israelites who would be living in the glorious years of the coming of their Messiah and of the institution of his earthly kingdom in the whole world. Then, according to their mistaken judgment, the Israelites, the chosen people of God, would be eating and would be drinking carefreely, having prevailed in the whole world.

Jesus wanting to take them out of this deception said the parable of the great supper and made it clear to them that none of the invited people would taste of the supper, since they showed indifference to the invitation which was given them. Specifically, as the aforementioned miracle-working hierarch observes, our Savior with this parable overturned their deceived opinion concerning blessedness, He ruled about their condemnation and preannounced the coming of the Gentiles to the Kingdom of God.

The interpretation of the parable

As the man who held the great supper is meant the philanthropic God the Father of the Lord Jesus. The supper is the saving work of the incarnate economy of the Son of God. It is called "great",

because admittedly, as the apostle Paul writes, great is the mystery of piety and of the incarnate revelation of God to the world (1 Timothy 3:16). It is called “supper”, first of all because, it took place in the last years of human history. Then, because as St. Cyril of Alexandria observes, in this the Lord underwent death and gave us His flesh, for us to eat it, being Himself the living Bread who came down from heaven, so that whoever eats it would not taste death, but would go from death to life (Jn. 6:32 et. al.). So for this reason Moses prophetically was putting the Hebrews every year to eat the Paschal bread at night, when they would be lighting the lanterns. The servant who was sent to call those invited is none other than the Son and Word of God, who whereas He is true God, condescended to take the form of a servant and to become a man for the salvation of humans (Philippians 2:5 -7). The wondrous Isaiah seeing Him prophetically many years before was calling Him “child”, in other words servant, of the Lord, who suffers for our sins (see Isaiah 52:13 et. al.)

Invited to the supper are the people of the Jews, who knew the true God and through the prophets many times received the joyous preannouncement of the coming of the Savior of the world. With the parable of the supper the Lord declares that He is the Messiah and that with His work in the area of Palestine He is calling His people to the Kingdom of God. Simultaneously however He foretells that the people of Israel in the end will not accept His saving preaching. The cause is their attachment to earthly cares and enjoyments. They could not accept the exhortations about love, charity and selflessness, since they were imagining the Kingdom of God to be an earthly and materialistic prosperity.

The result is that God the Father becomes enraged. The sons of the Kingdom will remain outside of it and will not taste the goods which they were expecting for so many centuries. Nevertheless, some of them – and specifically the simple people, who are likened to the poor and lame ones, because they did not know the Mosaic law well and the Pharisees were scorning them – they will immediately come to the supper. Truly, quite a few thousands of Jews already from the first day of Pentecost believed and were baptized.

Subsequently the servant of the parable goes outside of the city and forces so many people to come, so that the home of his master could be filled. With these words is prophesied the returning of the Gentiles to the true faith. The “force” denotes the great and amazing miracles which the apostles would perform with the name of the Lord Jesus, in order to break the idol worshiping people off from the centuries long deception and sinful life and to lead them into the house of God, the Church of Christ.

These words of Christ apply also for all of us Christians, who from the time we were baptized, entered into the Church and were called to partake in the eternal Kingdom of God. The main concern of our life ought to be our direct response to Christ’s calling. We must be careful that our hearts not become burdened by the material goods, the deceptive pleasures of the five senses, the cares of the present life and attachment to specific beloved persons of ours. Let us hasten to the supper, before the night of death catches us. Let us always have in mind the evil example of ancient Israel, so that we do not delay preaching the Gospel, but already from this life for us to partake in the symposium of divine grace partaking in the Mysteries of the Church and keeping the commandments of Christ with great fear of God.

Archim. P. K.