



11TH SUNDAY OF LUKE

December 11

THE GOSPEL READING

Luke 14:16-24

[Worldly Entanglements, Poor Excuses]

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.'"

THE SERMON

The Kingdom of God is present with us in Christ, and the Lord invites us to communion with Him as the One who prepares and provides all good things for us. In the Parable of the Great Banquet, the Lord Jesus shows us that He calls us to eternal joy in the



GREEK ORTHODOX
ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA
DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Kingdom, and the only thing that could keep us from enjoying that joyous banquet is our unwillingness to respond. However, God's call for us to enter His Kingdom never ends because of His great love for us.

We read in the parable that a man gave a great banquet, that is, a feast, and invited many people. The Man in the parable is God the Father, and the Servant whom He sends to call people is God the Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. However, those who were first invited gave excuses and refused to come. There are three excuses. One had bought a field, representing the riches of this world. Another had bought a yoke of oxen to plow, representing the commitments of this temporal life. Yet another had married a wife, representing the relationships of this world when they become more important than our relationship with God.

There is nothing wrong with buying property or working and investing in a career — and indeed, there is nothing wrong with marriage, which God created. God wants us to work, to be successful, and to gain knowledge and experience in life. He wants us to work to make this world a better place. The problem is not with things of commercial and family life, but that those who refused the invitation used these things as excuses to decline the invitation of God. They heard the call, but “the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches” (Matthew 13:22) became like thorns in their hearts, and they declined the invitation because they preferred their interests, rather than communion with God.

As a result, God invited other people to come and eat with Him. Those who accepted were the ones who had humble hearts and were thankful for the privilege of being invited to such a banquet. God invited all people, but only some accepted the invitation.

In this parable, Jesus teaches us the value of humility. The Kingdom of God is prepared for the humble who put their trust in God. The poor, the lame, and the blind responded to the call, while the ones who were too busy with their concerns rejected the invitation.

Hearing and responding to the call of God and His unwavering love results from a heart that seeks God above all things. We hear God when we want to become hearers of God. This happens when our *spiritual senses*, what the Church Fathers call “*the eyes of the soul*,” are activated. Our spiritual senses are an extension of our bodily senses: taste, touch, smell, sound, and sight. With our spiritual senses enhanced, when the grace of God comes to us, it fills our souls and bodies with *spiritual joy*.

To sharpen our spiritual senses, we must cultivate a calm and attentive stillness before God, which the Fathers call *hesychia* (in Greek, ἡσυχία), that is, *quietness before God*. We make time in our busy lives to be alone with God, to pray to Him quietly and with an open heart, and to be still and listen to Him. We also develop our spiritual senses by participating in the Sacraments, reading the Scriptures and spiritual books daily, almsgiving, and serving others in the love of Christ.

God continuously invites us to His Kingdom. We already begin to experience His

Kingdom here and now when we respond. We experience it in our communion with Him in the Eucharist, and in the life of the Church. As the Lord Jesus teaches us, His Kingdom is already within us, and to enjoy the Kingdom is to respond to God and receive all of His blessings and gifts which He gives us. Saint Cyril of Alexandria says, “And what was the nature of the invitation? ‘Come: for behold, all things are ready.’ For God the Father has prepared in Christ for the inhabitants of the earth those gifts which are bestowed upon the world through Him, even the forgiveness of sins . . . the communion of the Holy Spirit . . . and the Kingdom of heaven.”

When Christ gloriously appears as a loving and righteous God in His Second Coming, He will judge us according to our response to His invitation. There will be surprising revelations at the Final Judgment: some whom we might not think are close to God are closer to Him than we imagine. It is a matter of each one’s heart. It is up to us if we will respond to Christ.

The seemingly honorable people were invited in the parable, but they refused. The ones who were “compelled” to come were those who seemed to be outcasts — that is, the poor, the maimed, the blind, and the lame. Notice that God did not revoke the first invitation. The problem was with the ones who hardened their hearts.

God sees the heart, not just outward appearances. The humble people respond to God’s love. They accept the invitation and open their hearts, so they enter the Kingdom. God’s love wants all to be saved, but we need to want to be saved.

Our refusal to enter is the only thing that can keep us from the Kingdom of God. God never stops calling us, which is why we need to try and prevent the hardness of our hearts, or the desire for things in this life, from keeping us from Him. Christ says, “Many are called, but few are chosen” — and the ones who are chosen are the ones who respond to the call.

As another illustration of God’s calling to communion with Him, we remember that during this time of the year, we commemorate the Forefathers, especially Patriarch Abraham, two Sundays before Christmas. We are reminded that Abraham invited to a banquet three angels — a symbolic representation of the Holy Trinity in the Old Testament. The scene is made immortal in the famous icon by Andrei Rublev, representing the Holy Trinity. The icon is also called *The Hospitality of Abraham*.

This beautiful icon reminds us that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit live eternally in communion with one another. The One God Who exists in Three Persons shares an eternal communion of love between the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Mirroring that blessed life, God desires to bring us into fellowship with Him, inviting us to His banquet. He loves us and calls us to respond to His love.

of wholeness and rejoicing in true unity with God.

Do we respond to God in faith as Abraham did? Every day we have the opportunity to spread our hearts as a communion table so we can share in God’s banquet. We open

our hearts and the ears of our souls. Everything that brings us closer to God is an invitation. The Lord says to us, come and enter My Kingdom. By putting His love *first* in our lives, we respond to His call without having other things become obstacles or even excuses. We cultivate humbleness and meekness so we can respond to His call. His Kingdom is within us, and we receive His eternal life when we respond.

Follow us    @goarchDRE

Subscribe & read other sermons at: religioused.goarch.org