

## Prepare the upper room

All these things show that the preparation of the Banquet is two sided: both on the part of the Person inviting and on the part of those invited. And the Housemaster, on the one hand, in multifarious ways and constantly, assures us that as regards Him, "everything is ready". However, we also need to work intensely for our own preparations: to prepare our souls to have "ears to hear" the invitation through the Gospel. To cleanse our heart from passions, so that the "upper room" can be prepared, and the table be spread. And for us to obtain a "garment of the soul" bright with virtues, so that the servants do not tell us: "Friend, how did you enter in here not having a wedding garment? I wonder what toil is it not worth, for one to hear the saying of Saint Andrew of Crete: "Blessed is he, who is able faithfully to receive the Lord, as an upper room, on the one hand, having prepared his heart, and as a banquet, piety"!

Archim. B. L

## SUNDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2018, 11<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY OF LUKE

*The Holy Prophet Aggaeus (Haggai). Modestos, Archbishop of Jerusalem , Our Righeous Mother Blessed Empress Theophania , Nicholas, Patriarch of Constantinople, Memnonus, Archbishop of Ephesus .*

**TONE OF THE WEEK :** Fourth Tone

**EOTHINON :** Seventh Orthros Gospel

**EPISTLE READING:** Colossians 3:4 - 11

**GOSPEL READING:** Luke 14: 16 - 24

## NEXT SUNDAY, DECEMBER 23, 2018 SUNDAY BEFORE NATIVITY,

**FOREFEAST OF THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD AND SAVIOR, JESUS CHRIST,** *Ten Martyrs of Crete, Paul, Archbishop of Neo-Caesarea, Remembrance of the Founding of the Holy and Great Church of Christ, Hagia Sophia in Constantinople , Naoum the Illuminator of The Bulgarians , Nicholas & John the New Martyrs .*

**EPISTLE READING:** Hebrews 11:9-10; 32-40

**GOSPEL READING:** Matthew 1:1-25



66<sup>TH</sup> YEAR DECEMBER 16 2018 PAMPHLET #50 (3420)

## THE GREAT BANQUET

The reaction of those invited to the banquet seems strange and unexpected. The rich housemaster did not call them for a treat, but to a "great banquet". And not only this, but he honored them, aside from the official invitation, also with a reminder through the servant, that "everything is ready". In today's age, it is rather certain that no person would refuse such an opportunity of a rich banquet and – why should we hide it? – abundant nourishment for his vainglory.

### The cause of the refusal

A few years ago, a certain American millionaire, wishing to mock this sick thirst of famous people for projection, invited about 1000 individuals from the secular elite of New York, to a reception in the city's most aristocratic hotel. No one refused the invitation. All of them were there. Then, at the zenith of the feast, the housemaster took a microphone and told them: «Greetings! I am he who invited you. You do not know me, nor do I know you. However, not one of you asked «who is this unknown person who is inviting me». All of you overlooked this «detail», in order to not lose one more secular event. This is what I had to tell you and this is why I invited you. You may continue your amusement». It is obvious that the officially invited ones of today's parable, «the high priests and the scribes of the Jews and the more honorable people of the multitude» (Zygavenos) didn't differ very much from the secular people of the above mentioned event. They surpassed them, of course,

#### THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO (LUKE 14:16-24)

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.'"

In vainglory and hypocrisy. They were striving for "the first seat in the banquets, the embraces in the marketplaces", and everything – even to "widen the borders of their garments" – they did them "to be seen by men" (Mt. 23:5-7). So it was inconceivable for such egotistical people to refuse the invitation to a "great banquet".

And why didn't they respond, and furthermore making logical and lawful excuses, on the one hand, but insufficient excuses? The answer lies in the fact that they were not enthused by the meals which would be presented. The ready meals of the "great banquet" according to Saint Cyril of Alexandria, were: "the casting away of sins, the partaking of the Holy Spirit, the brilliance of adoption, the kingdom of the heavens". It is obvious that vainglorious, loving to be first, earthly viewpoints about the messianic kingdom, with national prosperity and glory, were not included in the offered «plates». So for this reason, those officially invited, not only were not enthused by the invitation, but they heard it as a bothersome wake up call and censuring.

#### Who shall «recline» and who shall be «cast out?»

Thus it is explained why, not only Herod, but also «all of Jerusalem was disturbed», when some other people invited from the depth of the East, «woke them up» asking them «where is the born king?» In other words, they told them: «Why are you sleeping? Wake up. The King himself came, «taking on the form of a servant», in order to tell us «everything is already ready». The table is ready and is awaiting us.» They however, «the official ones», how could they condescend to accept a wakeup call from "those invited from the streets and the lanes». And in order to continue their sleep, their startled king did not hesitate – as he ought not to have-, to slaughter thousands of infants.

After the refusal of "the most honored" invited guests, the housemaster invited from the "squares and streets of the city" the Jews who had "a weak, unenlightened and lame mind" (Saint Cyril of Alexandria). Christ invited them through his Apostles: "Go ye rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel". Many responded. And because there was still room, he also invited those coming from the gentiles with a "more intense invitation" telling the sent out servant: "compel them to enter in". This commandment however, does not mean the abolition of the freedom of those invited, and a violent approach. It simply shows that in order for the gentiles to believe, greater power is needed from God and a more toilsome journey for them.

That the "journey" for the children of Abraham was easier, shows characteristically in the life of Saint Constantine of the Jews (December 26). For this "good Israelite," it was enough to see a Christian, forming on his mouth the sign of the Cross, while he was yawning, in order to feel the calling of Christ to the "Great Banquet." He sought the truth, converted and became a Saint of the Church. And naturally he will judge his fellow compatriots, who scorned the divine invitation. The unjustifiability of their refusal, shows also from Christ's commandment to the Apostles: "if someone does not accept you and does not listen to your words, upon leaving, shake off the dust from your feet". And the only philanthropic Lord added the fearful words: On the day of Judgment, the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah will be judged more leniently than those who have not accepted your preaching".