

The Sunday of the Forefathers (Ancestors) of Christ

The Prophet Haggai; Theophania, the Empress; Modestos, Archbishop of Jerusalem

Sunday, December 16, 2018

Tone 4; Eothinon 7

Apolytikion for the Resurrection (Tone 4)

Having learned the joyful message of the Resurrection from the angel the women disciples of the Lord cast from them their parental condemnation. And proudly broke the news to the Disciples, saying: Death hath been spoiled; Christ God is risen, granting the world Great Mercy.

Apolytikion of the Holy Forefathers (Tone 2)

Thou hast justified by faith the ancient Forefathers, and through them Thou hast gone before and betrothed unto Thyself the Church of the Gentiles. Let the saints, therefore, take pride in glory; for from their seed sprouted forth a noble fruit, and she it was who gave birth to Thee without seed. Wherefore, by their pleadings, O Christ God, save our souls.

Apolytikion for our Patron, Michael the Archangel (Tone 2)

O ye foremost of the heavenly hosts, we beseech thee, though we are unworthy, pray that we may be encompassed with a shadow of thine unearthly glory; preserving us who kneel and cry endlessly: Deliver us from oppression since ye are the prince of the highest powers.

Kontakion of the Preparation of Christ's Nativity (Tone 3)

On this day the Virgin cometh to the cave to give birth to God the Word ineffably, Who was before all the ages. Dance for joy, O earth, on hearing the gladsome tidings; with the Angels and the shepherds now glorify Him Who is willing to be gazed on * as a young Child Who before the ages is God.

Daily Readings

THE EPISTLE (for the Holy Forefathers)

Blessed art Thou, O Lord, the God of our Fathers.
For Thou art just in all that Thou hast done for us.

The Reading from the Epistle of St. Paul to the Colossians (3:4-11)

Brethren, when Christ, Who is our life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these, the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience. In these you once walked, when you lived in them. But now put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and foul talk from your mouth. Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old nature with its practices and have put on the new nature, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator. Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and in all.

THE GOSPEL (for the Holy Forefathers)

The Reading of the Holy Gospel is according to St. Luke (14:16-24)

The Lord spoke this parable: "A man once gave a great banquet, and invited many; and at the time for the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, 'Come; for all is now ready.' But, one by one, they all began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a field, and I must go out and see it; I pray you, have me excused.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I 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 still there is 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 Synaxarion

On December 16 in the Holy Orthodox Church we commemorate the holy and glorious Prophet Haggai; Theophania the empress; and Modestos, archbishop of Jerusalem.

On this day we celebrate the Sunday of the Holy Forefathers (Ancestors) of our Lord Jesus.

Verses

Receive joy, O Forefathers which lived aforetime,
As now ye behold at hand Christ the Messiah.

Be glad, O Abraham, for thou art shown to be the forefather of Christ.

We remember all the holy Patriarchs of the Old Testament who prefigured or foretold Christ: Adam the first Father, Enoch, Melchizedek, Abraham, the friend of God, Isaac, the fruit of the Promise, Jacob and the twelve patriarchs. We then commemorate those who lived under the Law: Moses, Aaron, Joshua, Samuel, David, and the Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel; the twelve minor prophets; Elijah, Elisha, Zachariah, and John the Baptist; and finally the Virgin Mary, the intermediary between mankind and her divine Son. Indeed, the Lord Jesus did not come to abolish the Law and the Prophets, but to redeem humanity which bemoaned the weight of evil since Adam; to realize the promise made to Abraham; to change the Law of Fear into the Law of Love; and to give Resurrection and Life to mankind. This feast prepares us for the Nativity of Jesus Christ, placing before us the anticipation and hope for His coming among us.

By the intercessions of Thy Saints, O God, have mercy upon us. Amen.

A Note Regarding Holy Communion

Since we understand Communion to mean that we have all things in common, sharing an identical Faith, *only* those who are members of the Orthodox Church and who have prepared themselves through prayer, fasting and recent Confession may participate in Holy Communion. (We invite all, however, to partake of the blessed bread which is distributed at the dismissal.) Please see the Pastor for inquiries on how to become a member.

OFFERINGS

Holy Bread and memorial wheat* are being offered and the coffee hour hosted this morning by the Meena, Abraham, and Gascou families for the one-year memorial, and in loving memory of our beloved mother, grandmother Lillian (+6 December, 2017); also remembering those who have fallen asleep from the Meena, Abraham, Gascou, Butros, Hatem, Slatko, Gerro, Shalat, Maloof, Horaney, Boutross and Burosa families. Memory eternal.

Holy Bread is being offered by Ron & Kathy Zraick for the two-year memorial of Protosyngelos Paul Doyle (+17 December, 2016) of blessed memory and eternal repose.

Prayers are also offered for Ron & Kathy, celebrating their 60th wedding anniversary (December 17). May God grant them many years!

Special offerings and requests for prayer are being made . . .

for the continued recovery and health of the child Rose Najjar.

by Patricia Malouf for the healing of Monica Harris.

* The offering of wheat (*amha*) for memorial services is a practice that can be traced back to the middle of the fourth century. In earlier times, bread and wine with olives, cheese or rice were offered in charity, and those who partook of them would pray, "Blessed be his/her memory." The wheat is cooked sometimes with honey or sugar, mixed with figs, raisins, nuts and other sweets. The grain and fruit brought to the commemoration of the dead signifies that the dead will truly rise again from the grave, for both grain, which is sown in the earth, and fruit, which is laid on the earth, decays first and afterwards brings forth abundant ripe, whole fruit. The honey or sugar used with the wheat signifies that after the resurrection of the Orthodox and the righteous, there awaits a joyous and blessed life in the Heavenly Kingdom and not a bitter sorrowful one. The wheat prepared from grain expresses the faith of the living in the resurrection of the dead to a better life, just as that seed, having fallen upon the ground, although undergoing corruption yet grows to attain a better appearance. (See I Corinthians 15:35-57)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

December is "St. Ignatius Month" in the Antiochian Archdiocese

Members of the Order of St. Ignatius are assisting in the services this month. Today's ushers are: Reading the epistle this morning is Don Meena, and delivering a brief message is: Fred Milkie. For more information on The Order visit their website: www.orderofstignatius.org.

Teen SOYO Raffle Winners

We congratulate the winners of this year's Teen SOYO Raffle: First Place - Eid Sayegh, Second Place - Waleed Moujaes, Third Place - Chuck Malouf, and thank everyone for their support of our Youth Program.

Food Pantry Christmas Collection

Our food collection for the Christmas holiday is due today. Please speak with Cindy Tamoush should you have any questions or would like to make a cash donation. Our parish provides assistance to the local "Loaves and Fishes" food pantry in Van Nuys to assist with the needs of the homeless and needy families in our area.



Hard to believe it's nearly 2019, but it's just around the corner!
Please be sure to review the 2019 Coffee Hour sign-up chart in our kitchen.
Reserve your choice date to honor a birthday, anniversary, memorial of a loved one or just a random date to host or co-host a coffee hour.

Note to Coffee Hour hosts: coffee and paper goods will be provided each week.

Holy Bread Offering List

Dec 23 - open

Dec 24 - open

Dec 25 - John Apostolou

Dec 30 - Ramez & Rima Hage

Jan 01 - open

Jan 06 - open (Holy Theophany)

Jan 13 - the Azzam and Hallak families

Coffee Hour Hosts Calendar

Dec 23 - open

Dec 30 - Ramez & Rima Hage

Jan 06 - open

Jan 13 - the Azzam and Hallak families

Please contact Fr. Timothy (818/219-3761; pastor@stmichaelvannuys.org) to sign-up to offer Holy Bread and Cindy Tamoush at: (818-345-4363; famtam5@socal.rr.com) to sign-up for the Coffee Hour.

Church School Recess

Church School will begin a recess following today's program. Classes will resume on January 6, 2019, when we celebrate the Feast of Holy Theophany.

SCHEDULE OF FESTAL SERVICES

[The Sacrament of Confession with Absolution is available by appointment or up until 15 minutes prior to the services.]

The Sunday before The Holy Nativity

“The Sunday of the Genealogy”

Saturday, December 22nd – Great Vespers, 5 p.m.

Sunday, December 23rd – Orthros, 8:45 a.m., Divine Liturgy,* 10 a.m.

THE FEAST OF THE NATIVITY IN THE FLESH OF OUR LORD, GOD, AND SAVIOR, JESUS CHRIST

Monday, December 24th (Christmas Eve and *Paramon*)

The Ninth Royal Hour, 3 p.m.

Vesperal Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great* – 3:30 p.m.

Tuesday, December 25th (Christmas Day)

Orthros and the Christmas Canon, 8:30 a.m., Divine Liturgy,* 10 a.m.

[There is **no** fasting from December 25th to January 4th]

The Circumcision of our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ and the Feast of St. Basil the Great (New Year’s Day)

Monday, December 31st (New Year’s Eve) – Great Vespers, 5 p.m.
with prayers for the New Year

Tuesday, January 1st (New Year’s Day) – Orthros, 8:45 a.m.;
Divine Liturgy,* 10 a.m., with prayers for the New Year

THE GREAT FEAST OF HOLY THEOPHANY (EPIPHANY)

Friday, January 4th — The Ninth Royal Hour, 4:30 p.m. followed by
Daily Vespers of the *Paramon* (Eve) of Theophany, 5 p.m.

Saturday, January 5th The Eve of Theophany (*Paramon*) – [observed as a strict fast day]
Daily Orthros, 9 a.m., The Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom* 10 a.m.

Great Vespers of Holy Theophany, 5 p.m.

Sunday, January 6th — Festal Orthros, 8:30 a.m. followed by “The Great Sanctification
of Water” immediately followed by The Festal Divine Liturgy

* *Services with Holy Communion*

Parish Council Officers Elected

We congratulate our newly-elected 2019 Parish Council Officers: Michael Mitchell, Chair; Connie Barilla, Vice-Chair; Eric Nelson, Secretary; and Kris Thabit, Treasurer. We sincerely thank the Council members whose terms have expired: Three Council members were appointed by the Chair and Pastor with the approval of the Council to serve a one-year term in the next month. They are: Julie Bitar, Eric Nelson, and Dan Raju.

Young Adult Christmas Party

A "Potluck" Christmas Party is planned by Subdeacon Richard Ajalat for Thursday, December 20th, at 7 p.m. at his home: 616 Groveview Lane; La Canada, CA; 91011. For more information or if you plan to attend, please contact Richard at: 818-800-2418 or by e-mail at: rajalat@stmichaelvannuys.org

"O Lord, I Have Loved the Beauty of Thy House" (LXX Psalm 25:7) Part Nineteen

The following article is the nineteenth of a series of writings that helps us to understand how the relationship between the art, architecture and music of the Orthodox Church communicates the presence of the Kingdom of God in this world. This article is written by Father Timothy Baclig.

If by coming to church we are to deepen our experience of being members of God's Kingdom, it would help us to understand what is required of us in properly preparing ourselves to be participants at God's Banquet: The Divine Liturgy. Within the service of the Divine Liturgy, the Holy Eucharist (Holy Communion) is the "Sacrament of Sacraments." It is the culmination of all of the Sacraments, beginning with Holy Baptism (the Rite of Initiation), Holy Chrismation (Confirmation), and the repeated "Sacraments of maintenance:" Confession (Reconciliation) and Holy Unction (the Sacrament of Anointing for healing). The other two: a) Holy Matrimony and b) Ordination where both, at one time, fully contained within the service of The Divine Liturgy. Today, Ordinations remain the only Sacrament that takes place within the service of the Divine Liturgy when a Bishop is presiding.

In a previous article, mention was made about the place (within the church structure) where Baptisms occur; also about the “Service of Crowning,” when a couple is united in the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony in the church. Both of these Sacraments, along with all other Sacraments that are culminated in the Holy Eucharist, have their fullest meaning within the space of an Orthodox Church structure: an “Icon of the Kingdom.” It is where the images of iconography together with the church’s prayer language, as well as her hymnography, aid the worshipping participant in their spiritual ascent. This is precisely the reason why the full context of the Sacraments is known and experienced within the space of God’s Temple: the Church sanctuary. The Sacraments are for us a very tangible “point of contact” with God, as we become full participants in the symbolic (but real) experience of being united to Christ in God’s eternal Kingdom. And while some of these events have tended to be perceived as “private” if not “personal” family events in people’s lives, they are still Sacraments of the Church and not any family’s “private” or “personal” affair. To be united to Christ in the Sacraments of Holy Baptism and Holy Chrismation; to be united to Christ by being reconciled to our brother and sister in the Sacrament of Holy Confession (“Penance”), also to be anointed for healing by Holy Unction; and to be consecrated for Holy Ordination in an rank of church service; or to be crowned in the Mystery of Holy Matrimony as husband and wife; and ultimately to be a recipient of the Holy Body and Blood of Christ “...for the forgiveness of sins and unto life everlasting,” all of these encounters with Christ through the Sacraments of the Church have their place and appropriate time within the space of God’s House, the Church sanctuary, and within the full context of the Church’s prayers, hymns and iconography. As “timeless events,” they are truly not of this world. Therefore they are found to have their proper context in God’s Holy sanctuary on earth. It is precisely for this reason, for example, that weddings do not take place in parks or on beaches. A couple receives the blessing of the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony, and participates in the Sacramental life of the Church in the context of God’s eternal Kingdom that is not of this world.

Varieties of weekday prayer services in the church, many of which occur during periods of fasting, enable us to better prepare ourselves for various Feasts

of the year. One is never anxious or presumptuous in order to properly prepare to receive the Sacrament. Preparation is instead, serious and intentional; with humility, and at times, prayerful contrition. Numerous prayers are found in the prayer books of the Church that help us to recognize our need to be repentant. In a layman's Prayer on Entering the Church Temple are these words: *I will come into Thy house in the plentitude of Thy mercy; and in fear I will worship toward Thy Holy Temple... make my way straight before me, that with a clear mind I may glorify Thee...* And in a prayer said by the priest who prepares to literally enter into the space of the Holy Altar are these words: *How shall I the unworthy dare to enter the brilliance of Thy Holy Place, for if I dare to enter my garment will renounce me for it is not a wedding garment. Cleanse, O Lord, the defilement of my soul and save me, for Thou art the Lover of Mankind!*

Being mindful of our fallen state and sinfulness in order to repent is where one always begins. God's House, therefore, is for all of us, a place of refuge and a place of hope; a tranquil haven. It is as "the eye of a hurricane" is the calm and peaceful place of a world in a storm. We enter God's House, just as we would approach His Sacraments: "With fear of God, in faith and love..." And so, just as our entrance through doors that bring us into the sanctuary of the Church should never be with any sense of presumption, so must the Church structure provide for us a sense of the Holy. That experience is not known or realized without the exercise of earnest repentance. Hence, the glorious and brilliant imagery within the sanctuary cannot always be exposed as it is uniquely revealed each year during the forty-day period of Holy Pascha. Just as each of us must take seriously the labor of prayer and fasting in order to properly prepare ourselves to celebrate a Feast, so must the sanctuary of the church, at appropriate times, reflect the season with distinctive shades of dark and bright colors. Similarly, the function of the Royal Doors and the curtain of the iconostasion used at various times of the services are a visual aid to us in our spiritual quest to be properly united to Christ. [End of Part XXIX]

In the next article we will explore how all of the parts of our church sanctuary: the images, the sacred articles and rituals do not become for us idols, but "windows" and "points of contact" in our pilgrimage and ascent in prayer and worship of the Triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Capital Funds Campaign Committee Recommends Building Fund Donation Tax Benefits

A charitable donation of long-term appreciated securities, i.e., stocks, bonds and/or mutual funds that have realized significant appreciation over time is one of the best and most tax-efficient of all ways to give. This method of giving has become increasingly popular in recent years. There are two main advantages: 1) Any long-term appreciated securities with unrealized gains (meaning they were purchased over a year ago, and have a current value greater than their original cost) may be donated to the church with the benefit of receiving a tax deduction for the full fair value of the securities—up to 60% of the donor's adjusted gross income; 2) since the securities/stock is being donated rather than sold, capital gains taxes from selling the securities no longer apply. And the more appreciation the securities have, the greater the tax savings will be.

Second: A Qualified Charitable Deduction (QCD) is an option for anyone 70.5 years of age or older. You are able to take advantage of withdrawing from your personal IRA (Individual Retirement Account) without paying Federal or State Taxes. This will give the donor an opportunity to fulfill their pledge. You would not be able to take a tax deduction on the donation, however, not having to pay Federal or State Taxes on the IRA withdrawal far exceeds the benefit of a tax deduction. [Your IRA deduction cannot exceed \$100,000 per year.]

In both of the above options the funds would need to be transferred from either your Securities Brokerage Account or IRA Account directly to the St. Michael Antiochian Orthodox Church Brokerage Account in order for the donation to qualify.

Third: Many corporations provide their employees with a “Matching Funds Program” to the charity of their choice. The amount may vary with each company. We suggest that you check with the Human Resources Department or the Comptroller of the company where you are employed to see if such a program is being offered.

St. Michael Church has benefited by all of the above from its members. For more information please speak with Ron Zraick, Chairman of the Capital Funds Campaign Committee <ronaldzraick@yahoo.com>.

St. Michael Antiochian Orthodox Church of the San Fernando Valley

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Metropolitan JOSEPH, Archbishop of New York and all North America

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Church Telephone: 818/994-2313
www.stmichaelvannuys.com

December 16, 2018

Beloved Parishioners and Friends of St. Michael Church,

Seasonal greetings to you and your family as we anticipate the celebration of the Feast of our Lord's Birth!

As we near the end of our current calendar year and prepare our 2018 Annual Budget we face two challenges: 1) Phase II of our new church sanctuary, and 2) meeting our operating budget for the New Year. Each year our goal has been to meet our annual budget with the annual pledges of our membership. We have not obtained our goal and have faced a deficit for several years.

We thank you for your support of our parish with your attendance and contributions. The parish ministries have grown and expanded to help meet the needs of our growing parish. Having a financial commitment from every family is important to helping us meet our month to month expenses. Please prayerfully consider an increase to your 2018 pledge in 2019, or if you did not complete a 2018 Pledge Form, plan to complete one for the New Year. Having membership annual pledges are important to helping us meet our annual budget.

I and/or any member of our Parish Council will gladly speak with you in the coming weeks to answer any question you may have.

In Christ,

Richard Tamoush

Stewardship Committee Chair

Frequently Asked Questions When Completing a Pledge Form

What is the reason for completing an annual parish Pledge Form?

Each year planning for budgeted receipts and expenditures are an important part of being responsible stewards of Christ's church. Some of our month-to-month expenses include: priest and staff salaries, utility and maintenance expenses, the payment of property taxes (yes, churches do pay property taxes), and insurance. It is not uncommon for these expenses increase each year. It is a goal of our Parish Council to meet these expenses with the contributions of our members. The Pastor does not receive stipends (monetary gifts) for house blessings, baptisms, weddings and funerals if a family is not enrolled with the parish and completed an annual pledge form. The Pastor's living expenses and allowances are included the Annual Budget of the parish.

What is an annual "Fair Share Commitment?"

Each parish of the Antiochian Archdiocese pays 10% of its parish income to assist with the expenses of our bishops, Archdiocesan and Diocesan departments and programs. Over one-fourth of the Archdiocese budget is dedicated to youth programs. The annual payment to the Archdiocese from St. Michael Church is 10% of our parish income (excluding contributions received for the Building Fund, charity collections, special Archdiocese collections, and memorial gifts). This money is collected from our parishioners from their first contribution to the church: \$50 for each adult and \$35 for each child (17 years of age or under) in a household. All additional funds pledged by our parishioners assist with the month-to-month expenses of the parish.

Thank you!

We thank everyone who helped to make our Annual Church School Christmas Program meaningful and joyous. We especially thank contributors toward our Lenten Luncheon: Marilee Ajalat, Suzi Aparicio, Tanya Milkie, Leilah Lewin, Carolyn Sadd, Nicole Webster, Bobbi Monsue, our teachers, young adults, parents and all who provided us with Christmas cookies.

PASTORAL SERMON
The Eleventh Sunday of Luke – Sunday of the Forefathers
By V. Rev. Timothy Baclig
December 16, 2018

During the period from December 11-14, the church commemorates the Holy Forefathers of our Lord Jesus Christ. Today and next Sunday are the preparatory Sundays for the birth of Christ. Next Sunday we will remember the ancestors of Christ in the reading of our Lord's genealogy. Today we commemorate the Old Testament patriarchs, prophets and righteous men and women—the Holy Ancestors of our Christian faith. On both of these Sundays we are reminded of how God worked great signs and wonders through special men and women who responded to his call upon their lives. They were men and women with devotion, anticipating the coming of the Messiah.

Who were these men and women? According to the hymns heard yesterday and today we can hear the following names mentioned: First, persons of the earliest biblical period, some of which include: Adam, Abel, Seth, Noah, and Enoch. Second we hear of the patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Jacob's twelve sons who were also known as the twelve patriarchs. This is followed by women such as Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, Miriam, Deborah, Esther, Ruth, Judith and others. Then come the prophets: Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, Malachi, down to the last of the Old Testament prophets, John the Baptist. There are also special figures of the Old Testament that include: Melchizedek, Job, David and others. Then there is the three young men—Shadrach, Mishak, and Abednego who were rescued by God from Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace. These men and women were all known for their steadfast faith. Their lives reveal to us a lot about what it means to be committed, to honor God and shun idolatry, to be honest and truthful. They are examples of what it means to be righteous. They are our ancestors.

All too often, we are inclined to dismiss these ancestors as irrelevant pre-Christian Hebrews. The fact is they comprise an important part of our Christian heritage because their lives were lived in a manner that was totally dependent upon knowing God as an ever present reality. Their lives were not compartmentalized or secularized. They all lived with the very same needs that we know, but their day to

day choices were deeply rooted in a realization that one's life is not his own, and that our entire life is in the hand of God who is the Source of every blessing, and that we live in a fleeting moment of this created world.

In today's parable, the man who prepared the great banquet had invited many guests, as was the custom, and then *at the time of the banquet, he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready'* (verses 16-17).

The first invitation, the Fathers of the Church say, was the centuries-long preparation of the Hebrew nation for the coming of the Messiah; the second was the Good News (the Gospel) that He had come. The image of a banquet is a figure of the feast of God's presence among His people, both in the Kingdom on earth—in the Church, which finds its fullest expression in the Eucharist—and in its fullness in the world to come.

In order to more fully understand the parable, it is important to understand that a relationship exists between the host of the banquet and the invited guests. In fact, the initial invitation implied this relationship.

We hear beginning with verse 18: *And they all alike [one by one] (or "with one consent") began to make excuses.* The word "consent" in the verse implies that the excuses were contrived; more accurately it means that the invited guests all-together, or all at once (in unison) made excuses. They demonstrate identical selfish preoccupation with personal matters that took precedence over everything. They could have arranged their affairs so that they could respond to the Lord's graciousness. Instead, they chose to not just decline from attending, but gave 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'* (verses 18-20).

All three rather contemptuously disregard the generosity of the host, who cares for them and values their friendship. Their responses might be paraphrased, "Oh, I intended to go, but something more important to me has come up." The three excuses expressed in the parable are meant to typify human concerns and priorities that, important as they may be in daily life, are nothing in comparison to God's love and

care. The invitation and the response illustrate man's neglect of what is of infinitely greater value to him—salvation and life eternal with God—than his earthly, perishable and temporal concerns.

We never enjoy obligations. Each of us would love to be a host. Where our relationship to God is concerned, none of us should have a sense of obligation or a feeling of having to do what we don't really want to do. God does not intend to force any one of us to do anything. But He really desires a relationship with us. One that He hopes we desire as well.

The Jewish people had been prepared for a final invitation by the events of their own history and by God's speaking to them through the prophets. But since the prophet's message it did not offer any improvement upon what mattered to them, they rejected their invitation. You may recall from the reading of the Gospel heard on Easter: *He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him (John 1:11)*.

In the continuation of today's Gospel lesson we are told that when the servant reported these things, *the owner of the house became very angry and ordered his servant to 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame' (verse 21)*. The host began extending his invitation to outcasts: those in the "streets and alleys of the city." When the servant told him that this had been done and that there was still room, he ordered him to *go out to the roads and country lanes and make them (compel them) to come in* that the house might be filled (verse 23). And so, we learn from the parable that not only are those who were initially considered unworthy to be accepted as guests, but also even the Gentiles (all people) must be compelled to accept His invitation. The warning in verse 24—that *not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet*—refers to the last judgment: those who have rejected God's grace will have no part in His Kingdom.

In conclusion, the Church does not give us this lesson from the Gospel in order that we may despise the Jewish people for their rejection, but for our own instruction, so that we may not fall into the same error. Christians are the new people of God, the New Israel, and have learned that they must seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33). We, however, can be guilty of the same rejection in

many ways. We often place our physical health before our spiritual health, worldly learning before the knowledge of God, future material security before preparation for eternal life. And we, like the Jews of old, fashion our righteousness to suit our priorities. There is perhaps no better way to summarize this parable's meaning for us than to remember that we too can be replaced.

The Gospel concludes with the verse with the commentary: *Many are called but few are chosen (Matthew 22:14)*. Being the "chosen" is contingent upon our identification with God by the sincerity of obedience. Everyone is called, however, not all respond in the same way. The notion that God would discriminate and choose, or that He would favor a particular race over another, is totally preposterous.

Hear the words of the Apostle to the Hebrews: *We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape, if we ignore such a great salvation? (Hebrews 2:1-3)*.

In terms of today's Gospel lesson, you and I can also very easily find excuses to avoid our Lord's banquet. Let us not ignore this sacred banquet prepared for us with excuses or replace it with any earthly banquet. It would be easy for us to simply explain how the Jews were those who denied Christ without seeing the ways that we could also deny Him as the Lord of our life.

Prayer

O Lord Jesus Christ our God, who is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets, grant us courage in obedience that we may truly be the inheritors and heirs of your Kingdom. Keep us ever in your watchful care and protect us from the Evil One, for blessed art Thou unto ages of ages. A-men.

SUNDAY OF FOREFATHERS (ANCESTORS) OF CHRIST

PROPHET HAGGAI; THEOPHANIA THE EMPRESS; MODESTOS, ARCHBISHOP OF JERUSALEM

طروبارية القيامة على اللحن الرابع

إن تلميذات الرب تعلمن من الملاك الكرز بالقيامة البهجة، وطرحن القضاء الجدي،
وخاطبن الرسل مفتخراتٍ وقائلاتٍ: سُبِي الموتُ وقام المسيحُ الإلهُ، مانحاً العالمَ الرحمةَ
العظمى.

طروبارية الأجداد على اللحن الثاني

قد زكيتَ بالإيمان الآباءَ القدماءَ، وبهم سبقتَ فخطبت الكنيسةَ التي من الأمم، فليفتخرِ
القديسون بالمجد، لأنَّ من زرعهم أُنِعَ ثمرٌ حسيبٌ، وهو الأُمُّ التي ولدتكَ بغير زرعٍ،
فبتوسلاتهم أيها المسيحُ الإلهُ خلَّصَ نفوسن!

طروبارية رؤساء الملائكة باللحن الرابع

أيها المتقدمون على الأجناد السماويين، نتوسلُ إليكم نحن غيرَ المستحقين، حتَّى أنكم
بطلباتكم تكتنوفوننا بظلِّ أجنحةٍ مجدكم غير الهيولي، حافظين إيانا نحن الجاثين
والصارخين بغير فتور، أنقذونا من الشدائد، بما أنكم رؤساء مراتب القوات العلوية.

قنداق تقدمة الميلاد على اللحن الثالث

اليومَ العذراء تأتي إلى المغارة، لتلدَ الكلمةَ الذي قبلَ الدهور، ولادةً لا تُفسَّر، ولا
يُنطقُ بها، فافرحي أيتها المسكونة إذا سمعتِ، ومجدي مع الملائكة والرعاة، الظاهر
بمشتته طفلاً جديداً، وهو الإلهُ قبلَ الدهور.

الرسالة

مبارك أنت، اله آباننا، لأنك عادلٌ في كلِّ ما صنعتَه لنا.
فصلٌ من رسالة القديس بولس الرسول إلى أهل كولويسي.

يا إخوة، متى ظهرَ المسيحُ الذي هوَ حياتنا، تَظهِرونَ أنتمَ أيضاً معه في مَجدِهِ. آمينوا، إذا، ما هوَ أرضيَّ فيكم كالزنى والفِسقِ والهوى والشهوة الرديئة والفجور، فهوَ عبادة الأوثان،

وتلكَ أمورٌ تجلبُ غضبَ الله على أبناءِ المَعصية. كذلكَ كانتَ حالكمَ فيما مَضَى حينَ كنتمَ تعيشونَ فيها. أمّا الآنَ فتخَلَّصوا مِن كُلِّ ما فيه غضبٌ ونقمةٌ وخبثٌ وسُتيمةٌ. لا تتلفظوا بالكلامِ البذيءِ، ولا يكذبَ بعضُكم على بعضٍ، لأنكمَ خلَعتمُ الإنسانَ القديمَ وكُلَّ أعماله، ولَبِستُمُ الإنسانَ الجَديدَ الذي يتجددُ في المَعْرِفةِ على صورةِ خالقِهِ. فلا يَبقى هُنَاكَ يهوديٌّ أو غيرُ يهوديٍّ، ولا مَختونٌ أو غيرُ مَختونٍ، ولا أعجميٌّ أو بَربريٌّ، ولا عبدٌ أو حرٌّ، بلِ المسيحُ الذي هوَ كُلُّ شيءٍ وفي كُلِّ شيءٍ.

الإنجيل

فصل شريف من بشارة القديس لوقا

قال الربُّ هذا المثل: «أقامَ رَجُلٌ وليمَةً كبيرةً، ودعا إليها كثيراً مِنَ الناسِ. ثُمَّ أرسَلَ خادِمَهُ ساعةَ الولايةِ يَقولُ للمدعوينَ: تَعالوا، فكلُّ شيءٍ مُهيأٌ! فأعذروا كُلَّهُم. قالَ لَهُ الأوَّلُ: أَشتريتَ حقلاً ويَجِبُ أن أذهبَ لأراه، أرجو مِنكَ أن تُعذرنِي. وقالَ آخَرُ: أَشتريتَ خَمسةَ فِدادينَ، وأنا الآنَ ذاهِبٌ لأجربَها، أرجو مِنكَ أن تُعذرنِي. وقالَ آخَرُ: تَزَوَّجتُ امرأةً، فلا أقدرُ أن أجيءَ. فرجعَ الخادِمُ إلى سيِّدهِ وأخبرَهُ بما جرى، فغَضِبَ رَبُّ البَيْتِ وقالَ لِخادِمِهِ: أخرجُ مُسرِعاً إلى شوارعِ المدينةِ وأزقِّتها وأدخِلِ الفقراءَ والمُشوهينَ والعرجَ والعُميانَ إلى هُنَا. فقالَ الخادِمُ: جرى ما أمرتَ به يا سيِّدي، وبقيتَ مَقاعدُ فارِعةٍ. فأجابَهُ السيِّدُ: أخرجُ إلى الطُرقاتِ والدُّروبِ وألزمِ الناسَ بالدُخولِ حتى يمتلئَ بَيْتي. أقولُ لكم: لَن يَدُوقَ عَشاءِي أحدٌ مِن أولئكِ المدعوينَ، لأن المدعوينَ كثيرينَ، والمختارينَ قليلينَ!

ملاحظة بخصوص تناول القربان المقدس

إن مفهومنا لتناول القربان يعنى عمومية المشاركة فيه لذوى العقيدة الواحدة، الا إن المشاركة في سر القربان المقدس هنا مقتصر فقط على أعضاء الكنائس الارثوذكسية والذين يحضرون أنفسهم بالصلاة والصوم والاعتراف منذ فترة قريبة (وعلى كل حال، فإننا ندعو الجميع للمشاركة فى الخبز المقدس الذى يوزع عند إنتهاء مراسيم القداس). رجاء مراجعة الكاهن. إذا رغبت أن تصبح عضواً فى الكنيسة الارثوذكسية