

**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.