

The Heavenly Wedding Garments

Gospel: Matthew 22:1-15: *And Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said, The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise: And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen. Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk.*

"Friend,
how camest thou in hither
not having a wedding garment?"

Before He went up to His Passion, Jesus told three parables to the Jews of His time. Through these parables Jesus tried to warn and alert the Jews about fundamental truths.

According to Jesus, the Lord King set up a wedding for His Son. This wedding is the Kingdom of God, in which God is united to man. He invited everyone to this Kingdom. Many did not answer the call and some had even beaten and killed His messengers. Many are called but few are chosen. The descent of the love of God comes down on all. Everyone is called to be the bridegroom of the Son, the heavenly lamb. The Lord goes everywhere looking for them. The Gospel informs us that each and every one of us is invited to this Heavenly Wedding.

Among those who entered the Wedding, one was thrown out, because he was not wearing the wedding garment. The entrance to the wedding is conditional upon wearing a garment fitting for the occasion. Garments in the Old Testament do not mean just clothing. The garment is the outer appearance of the inner spiritual condition, reflecting the inner character of the human. That's why when the priests enter the Temple they change their clothes. The monk, for example, when he joins a monastery, changes his garments. In general, the Christian enters the church wearing clothes different from his work or casual clothes. Clothes are in a sense the glory of man and the "image of his inner passion." So what is the wedding garment that the Lord asked us to wear as a condition to enter the Kingdom and participate in the Wedding feast of His Son?

During Baptism, man is totally undressed. All earthly clothes are taken off him. We chant: "As many of

You who have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ." Yes, Christ is the true Garment for the Wedding.

What is the meaning of putting on Christ? St. Paul adapted this expression from the shows of the Roman theatre of his time, where one of the common people for example appears suddenly as a minister and behaves fittingly. His cloths make him take upon himself the character of the minister. That's why after Baptism, the Baptized is clothed with a white garment because this color carries the light of the face of Jesus Christ. He comes out of the font a new Christian.

We all realize that if we do not keep the beauty of this light and the brightness of this garment, if we disfigure the face of Jesus in us and act unfittingly, we then stain this white garment and disfigure the face of Jesus through our actions.

Whoever is clothed with Jesus, always behaves as Jesus. Am I in front of a poor person? Then I need to behave as Jesus would. Will I encounter an oppressed person, I will comfort him as Jesus would. Will a needy person encounter me? Let me then extend my hand to him and help him, for I am a Christian, a christ! The clothing of Jesus is not just about our outer behavior, but also about our inner thought. The Apostle himself says, "Let the mind of Christ be yours." My dreams ought to be the dreams of Jesus and my desires His desires, and my longings His longing. If I am asked for advice, I ought to give the advice that Jesus would give in such an occasion... Our white garment is stained everyday by black stains, so we ought to keep it bright by always trying.

Our trials are not always crowned with success. Our holy garment becomes torn, similar to the garment of a thief or a prisoner or a slave, and is no longer a wedding garment.

Facing this bitter truth, thinking of where we are and where we are ought to be, the Book of Revelation announces that those who have gone through this great hardship and the daily temptations "have whitened their garment by the blood of the lamb."

Let us brethren whiten our present dress by the blood of the lamb sacrificed for us. Whenever we contemplate our weaknesses and hesitations, and everything that is black staining the whiteness of the light of the face of Christ which we wear on our face, let us run and be whitened by the blood of the lamb given to us in every divine liturgy in the Holy Cup.

This is how we obtain the wedding garment, so that we do not get thrown out. We approach in the fear of God and with love and faith to partake of the blood of the lamb to wash our sinful face by true repentance, confession, and readiness, and the works of virtue, and the true Christian life. By this we regain the beauty of the divine face, and whiten our garment so that we cry with the chanter before every communion:.

How shall I, who am unworthy, enter into the splendor of thy saints? If I dare to enter into the bridal chamber my clothing will accuse me, since it is not a wedding garment, and being bound up, I shall be cast out by the angels. In your love Lord, cleanse my soul and save me.

Amen.