Archpriest Nicholas Karipoff

Sermon (29th September) 14th Sunday after Pentecost

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit

Today, as last Sunday, we heard a parable from the Gospel that has a concrete application to the history of the Gospel, the history of Christ and the Church. This parable ends with the words "Many are called but few are chosen." What does this mean? It is a statement which says we are the ones who choose.

The parable, like last Sunday's parable, refers to the first coming of Christ and in this one today – to the calling of the Jewish nation to this wedding feast of the King's son. But it is also is a warning to all the other nations and periods of history and all the Christian people that unless our attitude is proper we are going to end the same way as it happened in 70 AD when the Roman armies came and destroyed Jerusalem.

The image of the wedding feast is something that occurs a number of times in the Old and New Testaments because this is an image of our relationship with God - the relationship of the soul with the Bridegroom of the Church. At the beginning of Passion Week we bring out an icon of Christ wearing the crown of thorns. This composition is called 'The Bridegroom' and it's a reference to this particular parable. It is not by accident that St John the Evangelist, St writes in his Epistle: "Children, we aware of idols".

In this parable the idols are represented by two things: agriculture and trade, business because of attachment to these things, these worldly things that the people who were invited to the feast – rejected this invitation and some of them even took the messengers, beat them up and killed them. This is a clear reference to people like St Stephen the first Martyr, St James the Apostle, and the other Apostles, missionaries, and preachers – many of whom when they addressed the various nations, beginning with Israel (because this is where everything begins) they ended up being beaten up and killed.

The last part of the parable talks about the Host, the King going around and inspecting his guests and notices that one of the people is not wearing the proper wedding clothes; and he ask him: "My friend, why you aren't dressed properly?" The man had nothing to say. In the practice of the antiquity in the Middle East when a king, invited someone to a feast or special occasion he would send them the clothes that needed to be worn.

What does this all mean? The feast represents the liturgy, the Eucharist first and foremost; and it represents the Church as a whole and the life of the Church. The special clothes that we need to wear – this is a reference to the purity of the heart. But how is it possible when none of us are clean? How do we acquire these special clothes? It is through repentance, through turning

to God in the same way that we see in the Gospel: the publican, the harlot, the thief, the robber on the Cross – turning to God in repentance. They entered into the joy of their Lord, all of them.

In the rendering of this parable by St Luke (we heard it from St Mark) the King instructed people who were beggars and cripples lame and blind to be invited. This is an image of all of us because until such time as the soul enters and lives this relationship modelled by wedding feast –the life in Christ – we are like cripples.

Let us not forget the last works of this parable: ”Many are called but few are chosen” and remember that we are the ones who choose. Not God. God wants everyone to be saved. We choose. We cannot enter and pretend to be in this relationship when our attitude is wrong, when we don't have the spirit of repentance. It doesn't matter, it is impossible for us to live this life without falls, without sinning – but the important thing is to arise, to get up and repent. This is what repentance means – change of mind.

How do we acquire this spirit of repentance? It is through seeing ourselves. If we think that everything is fine we aren't going to have the spirit of the publican, of the harlot and of the thief. We won't, because we'll say: “I am pretty right, everything is alright, and I don't need to change.” It is only when we see what we are really like. This is why so much stress in the Church culture is put on knowing ourselves, seeing ourselves. This is why during the whole Great lent we pray with the words of St Ephraim the Syrian: “Lord, enable me to see my transgressions and not to judge my brother.” We won't to judge anyone when we see that we are really like. We will be compassionate, we will have contrition, we will have the spirit of the 50th Psalm, a wonderful Psalm of repentance – we will have that spirit.

Lord, give us to see our real self, our real condition so we will have the proper spirit in this relationship with You with the proper preparation – which is repentance. Amen