



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

PARISH OF THE ANNUNCIATION OF OUR LADY, “EVANGELISMOS”

59 CARR ST, WEST PERTH WA 6005 PARISH PRIEST: FATHER EMMANUEL STAMATIOU

MOB: 0419 961 313 EMAIL: stamatem@iinet.net.au

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SUNDAY 2 SEPTEMBER 2018

“WHO ENTERS THE KINGDOM”

EPISTLE: The Reading is from St Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians [1:21-24, 2:1-4]

Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us in God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee. Moreover I call God as witness against my soul, that to spare you I came no more to Corinth. Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are fellow workers for your joy; for by faith you stand. But I determined this within myself, that I would not come again to you in sorrow. For if I make you sorrowful, then who is he who makes me glad but the one who is made sorrowful by me? And I wrote this very thing to you, lest, when I came I should have sorrow over those from whom I ought to have joy, having confidence in you all that my joy is the joy of you all. For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears, not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you.

EXPLANATION:

The major theme of today’s Epistle is St Paul’s attempt to be reconciled to the Corinthian Church. Outsiders have shown up in Corinth, calling themselves “super apostles”. They claim to be better than Paul, alleging that he doesn’t measure up; that he is an imposter, indecisive and cowardly. In defence of his apostleship Paul teaches that the Holy Trinity is at work in every true believer. He does not preach by his own wisdom and knowledge but that apostleship is established **in Christ**

(1:21), through baptism, and **anointed** and **sealed (1:22)** in the Spirit through Chrismation. The consecrated myrrh used in the Sacrament of Chrismation inscribes the “seal”, the mark of authenticity borne by those who receive it, which brings grace, peace and guidance to those who submit themselves to the will of God. The Holy Spirit acts through both of the Sacraments of Baptism and Chrismation, evoking confidence and joy in believers, thus providing a **guarantee (1:22)**, a glimpse of that which awaits in the fullness of the Kingdom. Thus the joys of the Kingdom begin in this life, when we come to the realization of the existence and love of God, and grow to the degree that faith and love prevail within us. Thus, being the light of the divinity, grace cannot remain hidden or unnoticed. It acts in the apostles, changing their nature. They became more intimate with Christ. The divine energies become increasingly perceptible, revealing to the righteous the face of the living God, “the kingdom of God present with power” (Matthew 9:1). For Paul, the apostolic ministry is part of the “ministry of the Spirit” and is necessary for the manifestation of the Trinity in the Body of Christ. The apostles therefore have a real authority, a loving, serving authority, based on and empowered by the mercy of God. They have the indwelling presence of the Spirit which Christ gave them when He gave them the power to preach the Gospel to all nations. How then can Paul be called indecisive, weak and cowardly when he speaks with the power of the Holy Spirit? **“I came no more to Corinth” (1:23)** means that Paul delayed his return to Corinth to give the Corinthians time to correct their ways and to allow the Holy Spirit to work in their hearts so that they could live up to what was expected of them. He changed his itinerary to spare them a confrontation. The purpose of Church discipline is never for the leader to exercise dominion or harsh authority; but rather it is to call for repentance, reconciliation with the Church and renewal in the joy of the Spirit. **(1:24)** Paul cannot force their compliance to his guidance. As a teacher of the Gospel, he can only try to make them aware of the wonders of God’s Kingdom and to awaken their desire to partake of them. Salvation comes through faith in Christ which no one can impose on another. With the gift of free will, each of us responds to that which we learn about God. That response forms a relationship between Him and us. At the Second Coming of Christ, that relationship will be the basis for the manner in which we spend eternity.

GOSPEL: **The Reading is from Matthew [22:1-14]**

And Jesus answered and spoke to them again by parables and said: “The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come. Again, he sent out other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who are

invited, see I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding.” But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business. And the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them. But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then he said to his servants, “The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.” So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests. But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So he said to him, “Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?” And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, “Bind him hand and foot, take him away and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” For many are called, but few are chosen.

EXPLANATION:

This parable alludes to the disobedience of the Jews who vented their murderous rage upon those who were sent by God to invite them to the nuptial joy (resurrection) of His Son. God is likened to a human “**king**”, who makes a wedding feast for His Son, joining Him to every soul that is righteous. For the bridegroom is Christ and the bride is the Church and the soul, and the venue is the Kingdom of God. **(22:2)** Therefore, the “**marriage**” is a figure of the Incarnation of the Son of God – the wedding of Christ in His divine nature to human nature; of the union between Christ and the Church; of the union of Christ with human souls. The “**wedding feast**” is the Eucharistic banquet to which all who follow Christ are obliged to attend. The “**invited guests**” are the Jews. They were privileged to have God’s plan for mankind’s salvation revealed to them by the prophets. In every generation after Abraham, God’s works among the Jews pointed to the Saviour coming and Redemption. Thus, the descendants of the Israelites living at the time of Christ should have been ready for the great event which was the culmination of their whole history. But they rejected Christ as their Saviour. **(22:2)** The “**servants**” who went out were the prophets of the Old Testament who they killed. As the prophets could not persuade them, God sent out “**other servants**” – the Apostles of the New Testament who went out to bring the message of the Gospel. They went first to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel”. But the Jews “**made light of it and went their ways**”. That is, they refused to accept God’s word and went about their various tasks. Like the Jews who “made light of it and went their ways”, so also we

follow the same path when we are preoccupied with the vicissitudes of life and distance ourselves from God. All too often people have other things to do and do not remember God. The difference between us and the “invited guests” (Jews) is that we tend to justify our negligence. We say we are busy, but we also seem to think that the other areas of our life are of equal, if not of greater importance. **(22:5)** The “**oxen and fatted calves**” are the Old and New Testaments. The Old Testament is symbolized by the oxen, for it contained animal sacrifice, the New Testament is symbolized by the grain-fatted calves, for now we offer loaves (prosfora) upon the altar which consist of wheat. God therefore calls us to partake of the good things of both the Old Testament Scriptures and the New. **(22:3-4)** The rejection of the Good News and the killing of the servants of God (prophets and apostles) led to God’s fury – the “**burning of their city**”, which was the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD by the Romans and the call of the Gentiles. **(22:7)** The “**highways**” are the Gentile world who were separated into many ways and doctrines in error, delusion and deviation. They were not in the true way, but along the exits, which were the idolatrous doctrines that they taught. The parable proclaims the transfer of the kingdom from the Jews to the Gentiles, the casting out of the unbelieving Jews and the calling of the Gentiles into the wedding hall – the Kingdom of God. God calls all people to salvation in Christ – Jew and Gentile, carrying forth the plan of salvation to all humanity. **(22:9-10)** The “**wedding garment**” is the white robe of salvation which we receive at baptism when we “put on Christ”. (Galatians 3:27) It is symbolic of true repentance and righteousness. It is a symbol of love and that love is essential for participation in Christ’s banquet of reconciliation. Also every day Christians are required to put on the “mind of Christ”. (1Corinthians 2:16) That is, to imitate His love, His kindness, His compassion, His forgiveness. (Colossians 3:12-14) Yet many of us come to the great banquet of God’s presence as we are, without preparing ourselves in some way in view of the awesomeness of the occasion. We do not fill our hearts with love. We come with little or no sorrow for our sins and go back to the same old sins we were committing before. We come without repentance. We come wearing the garment of our own self-righteousness and pride. We come feeling that God will forgive us anyway. We are not dressed for the occasion and God will single us out and say, “**Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment?**” Then we will be left speechless. **(22:11-12)** And he will say to his servants “**cast him into outer darkness**”. **(22:13)** The Lord invites all people to His banquet, to the Kingdom of Heaven, but even among those who accept the invitation, there are many who remain unchanged, unaffected, keeping their “old garment” on and going about their lives and ways without a thought given to God. “**For many are called, but few are chosen.**” **(22:14)**