



**Welcome to St. Olympia Orthodox Church,  
a young and, God willing, growing community of worshippers.**

**Our priest is Fr. Peter Irfan, Acting Rector.  
You may reach him at 716-342-8520 (cell) or at fatherpeter777@yahoo.com.**

**Please join us for prayer and fellowship.  
Divine Liturgies are held every Sunday at 10 am.  
Great Vespers are held every Saturday evening at 5 pm.**

## Next Services

**Saturday, January 1st**

**Great Vespers  
5:00 pm**

**Fr. Peter is available to hear  
confessions before Vespers by  
appointment.**

**Sunday, January 2nd**

**Matins  
8:45 am**

**Divine Liturgy  
10:00 am**

**Fellowship to follow  
at  
St. Olympia Chapel  
123 Main Street  
Potsdam, NY**



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## Luke 14:16-24

*Note: the following article was written by an anonymous contributor.  
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In today's Gospel, Luke 14:16-24, we find what one commentator calls "one of our Lord's most instructive parables." But we cannot receive that needed instruction until we place this parable in its proper context. Our Lord actually told this story as a response to a remark made by one who was sitting at table with Him in a Pharisee's house for dinner one Sabbath day. Jesus had just finished teaching the invited guests to be humble instead of trying to push their way to the most prominent and important seats at the table, and to invite, not the rich and important, but "the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind" to their feasts; "and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just." It was in response to these words of our Lord that one man exclaimed, "Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!" Meaning what?

Well, the Jewish people in those days had their ideas of what would happen when the Messiah came, God broke into human history, and the golden days of the new age finally arrived. It would be like a great feast, a non-stop banquet. And we Christians use the same imagery in trying to draw a word-picture of what it will be like in the fullness of God's Kingdom. In describing that day, Revelation 19:7 exclaims, "Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." And in Matthew 22:2 our Lord Himself says that "the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son." But the Jewish people of that day expected that only Jews would be guests at that banquet; they couldn't even imagine Gentiles and sinners finding a place at God's table. So while this man had a glimpse of the glory of God's kingdom, he did not yet grasp who was invited into it. And that's why our Lord tells this story: to remind people then and now that while people may have the kingdom of God offered to them, they still may willingly neglect it, and be lost forever.

So note, firstly, what great and joyous provision God has made for our salvation: "A certain man gave a great supper and invited many." While being in covenant relationship with God in Christ certainly has its struggles and sorrows as we plow our way through this broken world as broken people still in process of being made whole, the essence of that relationship is joy, contentment, security and peace as we're held in our Father's arms. If being a follower of Jesus Christ is making us joyless, sad, and sour-pussed, we're not doing it right, because in John 15:11 Jesus says, "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full." Further, the Gospel is "a great supper," containing a full supply of everything we sinners need in order to be saved. We might not want to admit it, but we're all naturally starving, empty, helpless, and perishing. Forgiveness of all sin, and peace with God, justification of the person, and sanctification of the heart---what one preacher calls "grace by the way, and glory in the end"---are the gracious provision which God has prepared for the us. There's nothing we can ever require, which God has not already spread out on His table before us in Christ. Indeed, it is Jesus Himself Who is the sum and substance of the "great supper," as He Himself tells us in John 6: 35-56. "I am the bread of life," He insists. "He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst... My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed...He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood, has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."

Note also that the offer and invitation God extends to us in the Gospel is wide and generous. We read that this man "sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, 'Come, for all things are now ready.'" The invited guests, who had already agreed to come to the feast, didn't have to do one single thing to prepare this banquet; all they had to do was show up. There's nothing lacking in God's provision for our salvation. The Father is ready to receive all who come to Him by Christ. The Son is ready to cleanse from all their sins all who entrust themselves to Him by faith. The Spirit is ready to come and fill all who ask for Him. There is a limitless willingness in God to save human being, if only human beings are willing to be saved. As we've heard before from 2 Peter 3:9, and need to keep hearing until it really sinks in, God "is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

Again and again in the Gospel the Incarnate Word of God says to us humans: "Come," and that's addressed to all without exception. In Matthew 11:28, He offers, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." In John 7:37, He promises, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink." And perhaps sweetest of all to us who, wretchedly conscious of our sins and failures and regrets and missed opportunities and our own unworthiness, feel like all we can do is stand with our noses pressed to the window-pane, on the outside looking in to the wedding feast of the Lamb, in John 6:37 He lays His own honor on the line as He promises, "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out."

Thirdly, and sadly, we note that many who receive Gospel invitation refuse to accept it: "But they all with one accord began to make excuses" as to why they could not attend the banquet they'd already promised to attend. Each excuse was really trivial and phoney-baloney. They knew full well, if not the exact hour, at least the precise day on which this great supper would take place; and they could've made their business and marriage plans accordingly. But they didn't bother to do so, because clearly they held both the great supper and the man giving it in utter contempt.

And not much has changed in 2000 years. That's still the reception which the Gospel continually meets with wherever it's proclaimed. Every day thousands across the face of this planet are invited to come to Christ, but they will not come. And it's not ignorance driving their rejection of the Gospel; it's stubborn self-will and self-worship, and being so taken up with the things of this world that they hold in contempt, as irrelevant or unimportant, "the life of the world to come." It's that self-absorbed, procrastinating, excuse-making spirit, which leads thousands and millions to the doom of a Christ-less eternity. And it's just dumb. How often do we have to hear Hebrews 9:27 before it actually sinks in as a fundamental reality of our life that "it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment"? Like it or lump it: no excuse can justify a person in refusing God's invitation, and not coming to Christ.

But, lastly, let's note God's unconquerable desire to save human being and bring them into relationship with Himself, and His willingness to use all means to procure acceptance for His Gospel: the master of the house "said to his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the blind and the lame;'" and when this was done and there was still room, "the master said to the servant, 'Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.'" How different a picture of God that draws for us who, despite the Cross, still fear that God is cranky, impatient, and harsh! Surely this shows us that God's patience is inexhaustible. If some choose not to receive the truth, He'll invite others in their place. But His compassion for the lost and willingness to save will not be thwarted.

And that may mean that through us, God may even get a little pushy sometimes. That phrase "compel them to come in" does not mean it's okay to try to force someone to be a Christian. As hard as it is, parents need to learn that they cannot really make their adolescent children believe. Yes, Proverbs 22:6 does say "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." But there's a big gap between "child" and "old;" and it's that in-between time that's hard for believing parents. However, 2 Timothy 4:2 also tells us "Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort [encourage], with all patience and teaching." While no one has ever been argued into the kingdom of God, many have become open to the Holy Spirit's convicting work through the constant care, prayer, example and encouragement of some Christian who simply refused to give up on them.

But we're assuming something here, aren't we? We're assuming that all of us here are saying a daily "Yes" to our Lord's invitation: "Come to the supper; come to Me." But are we? Do our daily choices and priorities, how we spend our time, our money, and our interest, show that "Yes"? Or, with our own phoney excuses, are we really saying "I cannot come" and risking being shut out of the great supper for all eternity? It's your choice...and mine too.