

Bridegroom Orthros: The Wedding Garment of Humility

Behold the Bridegroom cometh at midnight, and blessed is the servant whom he shall find awake. But he whom he shall find neglectful is verily unworthy. Behold, therefore, my soul, beware, lest thou fallest into deep slumber, and the door of the kingdom be closed against thee, and thou be delivered to death. But be thou wakeful, crying, Holy! Holy! Holy! art thou, O God.

— *Troparion of Bridegroom Orthros*

The Scriptures are replete with comparisons of the Kingdom of God to a marriage. (Genesis 24, Tobit, Psalm 18/19, Song of Songs, Isaiah 61, Ephesians 5, etc.) The theme of the Bridegroom Orthros is that of watchfulness and preparation for this wedding as related in the Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25.1-13). Of course, the themes of watchfulness and preparation are throughout Lent, and the Sunday of the Last Judgment contains a passage for the same section of Matthew (25.31-46 for the Last Judgment, 24-25 for the whole passage).

We are to be watching and preparing for the Kingdom of God. Indeed, the Kingdom of God (and the King) is in our midst (Luke 17.21). However, we enter into it in an especial way when we come to worship and partake of the Divine Liturgy. Furthermore, as the saints relate to us, the Church prepares us to stand before God after our deaths. And keeping our death in mind will help us cast off our sin that ensnares us (Sirach 7.36, Hebrews 12.1).

St Matthew gives another parable (22.1-14) about a man who entered the wedding feast of the Son of the King without proper attire, without a wedding garment, and was cast out. For a hint on what this wedding garment is, let us look to the icon of Christ the Bridegroom. What is he wearing? The King of the Universe wears a false purple robe and is mocked with the crown of thorns (15th Antiphon of the Orthros of Holy Friday [The Twelve Passion Gospels]) indicating his humility. As St Paul writes to the Philippians, “Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (2.3-8 ESV).”

Therefore, since through baptism we died and were raised in Christ (Romans 6.1-14) our lives are now “hidden with Christ in God” and we are to be watchful, setting our minds on the things above and not of this earth (Colossians 3.1-3). But as it is said, “The way up is the way down,” and our post-communion prayers declare that grace shining forth from St John Chrysostom’s golden mouth has shown us “the heights of humility”. Let us then take up our crosses and imitate our Lord (Matthew 16.24-26), relying not on our own strength but his, working out our salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in us, both to will and to work for his good pleasure (Philippians 2.12-13). For “God has highly exalted [Christ] and bestowed on him the name that is above every name (Philippians 2.9 ESV)” and “When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory (Colossians 3.4 ESV).” In this we prepare ourselves for the marriage supper of the Lamb with the fine linen of the righteous deeds of the saints — chief of which is humility — granted to us to wear by the Bridegroom himself (Apocalypse 19.6-10).

I behold thy bridal chamber richly adorned, O my Saviour; but I have no wedding garment to worthily enter. Make radiant the garment of my soul, O Giver of Light, and save me.

— *Expaposteilarion of Bridegroom Orthros*