



My Beloved Ones,

This Saturday, September 1st, we will once again be blessed to celebrate the beginning of a new Ecclesiastical Year. The Gospel Reading for this Saturday is the traditional reading of Christ in the synagogue of Nazareth, where He Himself reads from Isaiah's prophecy of the Messiah, "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.*" (Luke 4:18-19) Having begun the year with Christ's declaration that, "*Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing*" (Luke 4:22), we are on Sunday, given a vision of the Kingdom of Heaven, and we are told what our responsibility is to ensure that we will enter the Kingdom.

As in last week's Parable of the Vineyard, Heaven now is compared to a marriage feast—but, like the Vineyard's tenants, the guests did not respond to the call of the Father. Like the Prophets, the King's first servants were ignored; with the arrival of more Prophets, the citizens "*...made light of it and went off, one to his farm, another to his business, while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully, and killed them*" (Matthew 22:5-6). In retaliation, the King sent his troops to murder those city dwellers, telling His servants, "*...The wedding is ready, but those invited were not worthy. Go therefore to the thoroughfares, and invite to the marriage feast as many as you find.*" (Matthew 22:8-9) We are told that those who were brought to fill the hall were both bad and good, just as Christ reaches out to both the sinful and the righteous.

In this sense, we are all called to the Eucharistic Banquet of Christ the Bridegroom with His faithful—but do we respond to the call? Or, like the citizens in the Parable, are we instead held down by worldly cares and by the doubts of the Devil? Christ ends His parable by describing a wedding guest who was able to enter the banquet in secret without a garment. One final time, the King instructs His servants to "*Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into the outer darkness; there men will weep and gnash their teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen*" (Matthew 22:13-14).

My Beloved, let us take this fresh start this new Ecclesiastical Year gives to us, so that we can be sure that, at the end of our lives we will not just have been called by the King, but chosen to enter the Marriage Feast as well.

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Metropolitan of Atlanta