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Our soul, our being, is colored by the things we give priority to

By The Rev. Michael Boyle, I

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In his June 1978 commencement address at Harvard University, Nobel Peace Prize winner, Soviet dissident and author Alexandr Solzhenitsyn said that as a child, he remembered the young men asking: "How did all of this terrible suffering come to the Russian people under communism? The response from his grandfather was always the same: "It is because men have forgotten God." Solzhenitsyn stated in his address at Harvard: "When men forget God they become wild beasts." We may ask ourselves today, Am I forgetting God?"

"The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding and they would not come. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise, and the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully and slew them" (Math. 22:2-3, 5-6).

In this Scripture, the Kingdom of Heaven is likened to a marriage feast, a joining together of two souls, becoming one flesh under God's mantle and protection and having the church as witness. The people were invited, but when the time came to appear, they chose to go and do something else. The parable sheds light on Christ's calling of mankind to salvation: He invites all to his eternal feast, but we must respond to his call. We must not make light of it, not go our way to our "farm" (our own personal property), nor our "merchandise" (the multitude of activities, which distract our attention from the one thing needful).

St. Nikolai Velimirovic, wrote about this "wedding of the soul" to whatever it loves: "That about which a man most often thinks, that he most loves and most zealously desires, will gradually become the very essence of his being. If the soul is lax in faithfulness to God and joins itself to something earthly, it gradually becomes a servant, a slave, a dark/despairing shadow and finally a miserable picture of weeping and gnashing of teeth. Whatever it is with which the human soul links itself, it is most closely with that to which it is in wedlock."

By turning away from God and his daily call to the wedding feast, we become hard of hearing to his word; we become blind to his presence; we become forgetful of him and of salvation. With forgetfulness comes insensitivity, hardness of heart, self-indulgence, selfishness and a multitude of other passions. We "forget the angels" and we become beasts, spitefully using others and "slaying them" with our gossip and unkind words and actions.

The Scripture says that they who were bidden were not worthy of the feast. They were "not worthy" not because of pre-determined criteria that God set before mankind, but rather they were found to be unworthy because they did not respond to the invitation.

They were not chosen because they had already chosen a position that was not in keeping with the spirit of a heavenly wedding, not in harmony with that quality of life, which granted admission. This man in the Scripture had no heavenly wedding garment. In other words, the man's soul was clothed in something else besides "heavenly linen," the Holy Spirit. His soul was adorned with coarse threads of worldly cares, worldly vices, worldly distractions and entertainments ... earthly matter.

During the late 20th century Archimandrite Dimitri commented about the spiritual climate of the times and the challenge facing all people: "Humanity has entered a new epoch, that of decline and decadence. The concerns of people are directed to the earth and to success in everything earthly. But the higher truth ordained by God has been almost abandoned."

At the same time St. Ignatius Brianchaninov reflected that "people had begun to be occupied primarily with the concerns of earthly happiness. When a person is primarily occupied with the concerns of his earthly prosperity, then the soul grows coarse and from something immaterial becomes, as it were, material." This earthly coarseness was precisely what this man's soul was clothed with and of which was not fitting for the Eternal Feast.

We live as angels ... when we remember God. The destiny that the soul hungers for is to return to its creator and its true home (the marriage feast with Jesus Christ). St. Nikolai concludes his thoughts on our return to God by saying: "In all love, a man is gradually lost in the object of his love. That about which a man most often thinks, that he most loves and most

zealously desires, will gradually become the very essence of his being. A man is saved or lost by his love in this life." This object of a man's love, whether heavenly or earthly, becomes then his wedding garment, and that to which his soul is wed for eternity.

May God help us to remember him, and to love him, and through this remembrance and love may we find salvation and entrance into the Heavenly Wedding Feast of Jesus Christ.

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