

The Reading is from the Holy Gospel According to St. Luke (14:16-24 & Matt. 22:14; Col. 3:4-11)

+ In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit +

We receive all things from God. And indeed we've received all that we need for salvation. And God can provide and clothe and feed us, O even us of little faith, if only we trust Him, and put Him first and do not rebel. But if we make excuses then even in the midst of receiving our things from God His wrath may come upon us. Just as in the wilderness the Israelites received the meat from God, but it while it was still in their teeth, before it was chewed, the Lord's anger was aroused against the people, and the Lord struck them with a very great plague.<sup>i</sup>

Since we have received from God what is necessary for salvation and life on this earth, excuses and self-justification are deadly for the spiritual life. Excuses are like throwing rocks into the pool of our heart; it creates nothing but constant ripples and noise. There can be no calm or peace in the heart that is full of excuses. Excuses insulate us from God. Elder Paisios says, "Can an electric current pass through insulation?"<sup>ii</sup> No. So too do excuses insulate us from God. Justification and excuses are "like building a wall and separating [ourselves] from God,"<sup>iii</sup> and others. And since we cannot be saved apart from God and each other, excuses are death.

Excuses turn a person into a "demonic refuge." The more he excuses himself the more he is "deceived by the devil, and justifies everything: self-will, obstinacy, [lies and egotism]."<sup>iv</sup> In fact egotism is where excuses come from.<sup>v</sup> If anyone in today's Gospel should make an excuse not to go the banquet it should be the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind. The poor cannot afford to travel, the blind cannot find their way, the maimed and the lame can hardly move. But they are the humble. The egotists are the ones who make the excuses.

When one sins, or receives correction, "not only must one not excuse himself, but he must also embrace [any] injustice done to him. It is justification that exiled us from paradise. Is this not what happened to Adam? God asked him, 'Have you eaten from the tree which I commanded you not to eat?' He did not answer, 'Yes, Lord, I disobeyed your commandment and sinned; forgive me.' Rather, he tried

to justify his disobedience. ‘The women you gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.’ This response is if Adam had said You [God] are to blame for my transgression because you created Eve!”<sup>vi</sup>

And now we’ve come full circle. We’ve received all things from God; for our temporal life and our salvation. We have received from God our Eve. We have received our home, our jobs, and our families from God. But we cannot allow these gifts from God to be the excuses that keep us from the banquet, which is the Church, the Divine Liturgy with the Eucharist as the main course.

Those who excuse themselves from the Divine Meal and the life of the Church are usually those egotists who put themselves, their homes, jobs, and families before God. And they do this because they have not put to death what is earthly in themselves; following the world.

The Kingdom of God runs counter to that. If you wanna be a real rebel these days, if you wanna be counter cultural, trying an authentic Orthodox Christian. Because the rest of the world’s counter-cultural movements and rebel all do the same thing: They make excuses, they justify themselves, and arrange their lives around their ego, their own passions, and they seek after the things of the old man. The humble arrange their lives around the Divine banquet.

We got our “save the date card” for the banquet when we were born. And we got our formal invitation when we baptized. And so we do not reject our baptism. Listen, “not all of us who are called Christians...will be reckoned as belonging to the Christian race, but only those who live according His will, keep His commandments, and make up their shortcomings with repentance,”<sup>vii</sup> rather than excuses, will come in that house may be filled. Let us accept the Servant’s invitation, make haste to the banquet and with fear of God, faith and love draw near.

+ In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit +

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<sup>i</sup> St. Gregory Palamas, *The Homilies*, ed. Christopher Veniamin and The Monastery of St. John the Baptist, Essex. Mount Thabor Publishing, Waymart, PA, 2009.

<sup>ii</sup> Elder Paisios of Mount Athos, *Spiritual Counsels*, vol. iii ‘Spiritual Struggle.’ Ed. Anna Famellos & Andronikos Masters. Trans. Peter Chambers. Holy Monastery “Evangelist John the Theologian,” p. 94.

<sup>iii</sup> Elder Paisios, 94.

<sup>iv</sup> Elder Paisios, 104.

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- <sup>v</sup> Elder Paisios, 97.  
<sup>vi</sup> Elder Paisios, 97-98.  
<sup>vii</sup> Gregory Palamas