

THE PARABLE OF THE GREAT SUPPER

December 15, 2019
14th Sunday after Pentecost
11th Sunday of Luke
Revision F

Gospel: Luke 14:16-24
Matthew 22:1-14

Jesus used today's Gospel lesson twice (at least). As it is recorded in Luke 14, Jesus was in Perea just after Hanukkah, 29 AD (compare John 10:22). As it is recorded in Matthew 22, Jesus was in Jerusalem on Tuesday of Holy Week, 30 AD. In the East and in the West, both accounts are used regularly. The Eastern Church uses Matthew's account for the 14th Sunday after Pentecost (generally September, but sometimes taken out of order) and Luke's account for the Sunday of the Ancestors of Christ (two Sundays before Christmas). The Western Church uses Matthew's account for about the same time of year (September or October), and Luke's account for either New Year's Day or the 2nd Sunday after Trinity (May).

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Reflecting on the Parable of the Great Supper as related to the Ancestors of Christ, not everyone who was invited to the Supper refused to come. The Ancestors of Christ came joyfully and properly clothed, and represent a list of role models for us to follow.

Gospel: Luke 14:16-24; Matthew 22:1-14

Since there are many similarities, but also notable differences between the accounts of Matthew and Luke, it is instructive to compare them side-by-side.

Table I is a side-by-side comparison of the features of the parables in Luke and Matthew. The bottom line of both parables was that the Kingdom of God was about to be taken away from the Jews and given to others. Both were told at very public events: Luke's account took place at a big dinner at a Pharisee's house (Luke 14:1) attended by local dignitaries (Luke 14:7-8, 12). Luke doesn't say what the occasion was, but it could have been a wedding feast from Jesus' remarks (Luke 14:8). Matthew's account took place in the Temple (Matthew 21:23), where the chief priests and elders confronted Jesus as He taught.

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In Luke’s account, Jesus had just finished saying to the host (who invited Him) that when giving a feast it would be better to invite the poor, maimed, lame and blind – who are unable to repay – rather than relatives and rich neighbors. That way one would be repaid at the Resurrection (Luke 14:12-14). The Parable was then given (featuring the poor, maimed, lame and blind) in response to the remark of one of the dignitaries: “Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God” (Luke 14:15). At this point, it is worthwhile to consider the Lord’s Supper, since the Lord’s Supper is a foretaste of eating bread in the Kingdom of God. All of us are poor, maimed, lame and blind as we come to the Lord’s Table, and we are called blessed as we receive “the least of these My brethren” (Matthew 25:40).

In Matthew’s account, Jesus’ confrontation with the Jewish leaders had gotten more acute. They had interrupted His teaching in the Temple to ask by what authority He did what He did (Matthew 21:23). After Jesus embarrassed them with a question about John the Baptist, He stated that tax collectors and harlots were entering the Kingdom of God before them. Jesus followed this with the Parable of the wicked vineyard tenants (Matthew 21:33-41) and the stone that the builders rejected (Matthew 21:42-46). Then He told the Parable of the Great Marriage Feast; the chief priests and Pharisees then knew He was talking about them (Matthew 21:45).

**TABLE I
COMPARISON OF PARABLES:
GREAT SUPPER AND MARRIAGE FEAST**

	Great Supper (Luke 14)	Marriage Feast (Matthew 22)
Parable told	December 29 AD	April 30 AD
Location	At Pharisee’s dinner in Perea	At Temple in Jerusalem
Central figure	A certain man	A certain king
Purpose of event	A great supper	A marriage feast for king’s son
Invitees	Rich & famous of Israel	Rich & famous of Israel
Excuses	Bought land, need to see it; bought oxen, need to test them; just got married	Left for his farm; left for his business; treated servants rudely & killed them
Central figure’s reaction	Angry	Furious; his armies killed them & burned their cities
New invitees	From streets & lanes: the poor, maimed, lame, blind from highways and hedges: the Gentiles	From highways: good and bad
Problems	- -	Man without wedding garment

In both parables, the central figure is God the Father who has prepared a Great Supper (Luke 14:16) and a Marriage Feast for His Son (Matthew 22:2). He invited His own chosen people, but His own did not receive Him (John 1:11). He sent His servants, the Apostles and Prophets “to say to those who were invited: ‘come, for all things are now ready’” (Luke 14:17, Acts 13:46, 18:6). But those invited began to make excuses. These excuses can be boiled down to the seed that fell among thorns in the Parable of the Sower: they got choked with the cares, riches and pleasures of life (Luke 8:7, 14).

The Excuses

One of those invited said he had just bought a field and he must go see it. This may seem strange to us that someone would buy a field before he had ever seen it. Under Old Testament Law, however, the land belonged to the Lord and could not be sold permanently (Leviticus 25:23). In the Year of Jubilee (every 50th year), all land reverted to the family of its original inheritor as the land was divided at the time of Joshua (Leviticus 25:28). The worth of any land that was sold was calculated in terms of how many years until the next Year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25:27). Thus when one bought a field, one bought a number of years' crops and not the land itself (Leviticus 25:16). Thus one did not need to see land to determine its sale price, but one did need to see it to determine its readiness; he needed to know quickly what needed to be done to the field.

From Table II, one can see that someone buying land just after Hanukkah (December) has to be concerned about the late planting. If he takes a week off to attend a marriage feast, he may miss much of the spring rains – which can be very intermittent. Another consideration was what seed, if any, was already in the ground? Grain had already been planted, but hoeing was mandatory between December and February to keep weeds down and make harvesting easier (compare the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares – Matthew 13:24-30). The person buying the field needed to see the field to determine what had to be done.

Buying land often meant buying it from someone who was hopelessly in debt. And the creditor could then take over the debtor's land as well as take the debtor and his family as slaves (Leviticus 25:39ff). Foreclosing on debtors like this could be very lucrative for a creditor because he could afford to work the land much more efficiently than a poor man. Efficient use of land is what made the Rich Fool into a very wealthy man (Luke 12:16-19), and this new landowner seems very caught up in acquiring the riches of this life.

Another of those invited begged off because he just bought five yoke of oxen and needed to test them. Oxen were used¹ for plowing using crude plows (compared to today). A “plow” was little more than a stick that was stuck in the ground and dragged by oxen. Plowing couldn't be done in dry soil; it would break the “plow”. One had to wait for some of the first winter rain to loosen up the soil. Since he had bought five yoke of oxen, one can presume that he had a lot of land to plow and a number of servants to use the oxen. Thus he was managing a large farm. In this case, the new owner was really wrapped up in the cares of the world since he didn't have much time to get his fields ready for planting.

Still another of those invited said that he just got married and therefore couldn't come. According to Old Testament Law: “When a man takes a new wife, he shall not go out with the army, nor be charged with any duty; he shall be free at home one year and shall give happiness to his wife whom he has taken” (Deuteronomy 24:5). Gregory the Great wrote² that this excuse signifies the pleasures of the flesh.

¹ Gower, Manners and Customs of Bible Times, pp. 87-95.

² Gregory the Great, Parables of the Gospel, XXXVI.

TABLE II
PLANTING AND HARVESTING SCHEDULE
FROM THE GEZER CALENDAR³

Name of Month	Corresponds To	Number of Days	Month of Civil Year	Month of Sacred Year	Agricultural Events
Nisan (Abib)	Mar.-Apr.	30	7th	1st	Hoeing up of Flax
Iyar	Apr.-May	29	8th	2nd	Barley Harvest
Sivan	May-June	30	9th	3rd	Harvest and Festivity
Tammuz	June-July	29	10th	4th	Vine Tending
Ab	July-Aug.	30	11th	5th	
Elul	Aug.-Sept.	29	12th	6th	Summer Fruit
Tishri	Sept.-Oct.	30	1st	7th	Olive Harvest
Heshvan	Oct.-Nov.	29 or 30	2nd	8th	
Chislev	Nov.-Dec.	29 or 30	3rd	9th	Planting Grain
Tebeth	Dec.-Jan.	29	4th	10th	
Shebet	Jan.-Feb.	30	5th	11th	Late Planting
Adar	Feb.-Mar.	29 or 30	6th	12th	

All the above excuses are reasonable excuses, but they all represent a decision on the part of the excuse-giver that was made regarding the importance of the supper or the feast. The supper had been planned a long time; they had time to prepare to attend. But their decision was that the cares, riches, and pleasures of life were more important to them. Here we might ask ourselves if we make similar excuses to avoid going to Church and partaking of the Lord's Table.

The same thing applies to us today, especially to those who may despise a priest who happens to irritate them. We have no good reason to despise him, for it is God who sent him. Gregory the Great wrote⁴,

“We must see that the servant sent with invitations by the Master of the household represents the preachers of the Church (beginning with Christ and the Twelve Apostles). It often happens that a powerful person has a contemptible servant, and when he sends a message by this servant to relatives or to strangers, those who hear him do not think of the person who brings the message but only of the message he brings and the person who sent it. And if you consider us preachers unworthy, nevertheless venerate God who calls you through us”.

John Chrysostom stated⁵ that Christ does not drag people to His Kingdom against their will. People will be dragged to hell against their will; but if people were dragged into the Kingdom, it would be an insult to the nature of the blessings of the Kingdom.

“But some man will say, ‘He ought to bring men in, even against their will’. However, He does not use violence, nor compel; for who in the world that invites someone to honors, crowns, banquets and festivals, drags them, unwilling and bound? No one! Doing this would be inflicting an insult! To hell He sends men against their will, but to the kingdom He calls willing minds. To the fire He brings

³ The Gezer Calendar dates from the time of the conquest of Canaan under Joshua and was a schoolboy's exercise describing the yearly agricultural schedule.

⁴ Gregory the Great, *Parables of the Gospel*, XXXVI.

⁵ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Corinthians*, II, 9.

men bound and bewailing themselves; to the endless state of blessings not so. Otherwise it is a reproach to the very blessings themselves; their nature is such that men should run to them of their own accord and with thankfulness. ‘Why then’, you say, ‘do men not choose them?’ From their own infirmity! ‘And why does He not cut off their infirmity?’ How tell me should He cut it off? He has made a world that teaches His loving-kindness and His power. For ‘the heavens declare the glory of God’ (Psalm 19:1). He has also sent prophets. He has both called and honored us. He has done wonders. He has given a Law both written and natural. He has sent His Son and commissioned the Apostles. He has threatened hell and promised the kingdom. Every day He makes His sun to rise. Are not the things, which He has asked, so simple and easy, that many people transcend His commandments in the greatness of their self-denial? As Isaiah said, ‘What was there to do to the vineyard that I have not done?’” (Isaiah 5:4)

In Matthew’s account of the Parable, the excuse-givers ignored the servants’ invitation, but also seized the servants, treated them with violent insults and murdered them (Matthew 22:6). This occurred with Jesus at His trial (Luke 18:32, 22:64-65, Matthew 27:27-31) and with the Apostles for their whole lives (Acts 12:1-3, 14:4-6, 16:19-24, 1 Thessalonians 2:2). The King in Matthew’s account was furious and sent his armies to destroy those murderers and burn their cities (Matthew 22:7). This happened in 68-70 AD when the Roman General Titus destroyed Jerusalem and massacred its inhabitants.

With the original list of invitees decimated with no-shows, the central figure in both Parables extended His invitation farther afield. In Luke’s account, He first sent His servants into the streets and lanes of the city to bring in the poor, maimed, lame and blind (Luke 14:21). The word street (Greek: *platus*) refers to a broad street. Jesus taught in broad streets (Luke 13:26); people later brought the sick out into the broad streets such that the shadow of the Apostle Peter passing by might fall on some and heal them (Acts 5:15). The word lane (Greek: *rhume*) refers to the crowded streets or narrow streets. Together the streets and lanes refer to the underbelly of Jewish society: the uneducated, the poor, the crippled, the blind, etc. This is the part of Jewish society that Jesus spoke to a lot (Luke 7:22), and from which many of the Apostles came (Acts 4:13).

After the servants did as their Master had commanded, they reported to Him that there was still room at the Great Supper (Luke 14:22). The Master then sent them into the highways and hedges to compel others to come in that His house may be filled. The highways (Greek: *hodos*) are the main roads from city to city and country to country. Traveling on these roads, one would find many Gentiles. The hedges (Greek: *phragmos*) are walls or barriers such as one might find around a vineyard to prevent theft (Matthew 21:33, Mark 12:1) or between courtyards to keep out unlawful entry (Ephesians 2:14). Gregory the Great wrote⁶ that the people called from the highways and the hedges are the rustic people; that is, the Gentiles.

Tertullian stated⁷ that God continually called His people to His banquet by the voice of the Prophets, which is the voice of the Holy Spirit. When His people didn’t listen and refused the

⁶ Gregory the Great, Parables of the Gospel, XXXVI.

⁷ Tertullian, Five Books Against Marcion, II, ii, 4, 31.

invitation, He sent out the call to others. Since they made Him jealous by refusing His invitation, He promised to make them jealous of the Gentiles. The result was a prolonged animosity of the Jews toward the Christians for several centuries.

“In a manner most germane to this parable, He said, ‘Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people; and you shall walk in all my ways, which I have commanded you’. This is the invitation of God. ‘But they didn’t listen’. This is the refusal of the people. ‘They departed, and walked everyone in the imagination of their evil heart’ (Jeremiah 7:23-24). ‘I have bought a field; I have bought some oxen; and I have married a wife’ (Luke 14:18-20). And still He urges them, ‘I have sent to you all my servants the prophets, rising early even before daylight’ (Jeremiah 7:25). The Holy Spirit is here meant, the admonisher of the guests. ‘Yet my people didn’t listen to me, but hardened their neck’ (Jeremiah 7:26). This was reported to the Master of the family. He was moved, and commanded them to invite people out of ‘the streets and lanes of the city’ (Luke 14:21). This is the same in purpose as His words by Jeremiah. ‘Have I been a wilderness to the house of Israel, or a land left uncultivated?’ That is to say, ‘Do I have no people I can call my own; have I no place to bring them?’ ‘My people have said that they will come to Me no more’ (Jeremiah 2:31). Therefore He sent out to call others, but from the same city” (Luke 14:23).

“Although the place abounded with people, yet He commanded that they gather men from the highways and the hedges. In other words, we are now gathered out of the Gentile strangers, with that jealous resentment, which He expressed. ‘I will hide My face from them, and I will show them what shall happen in the last days, how others shall take their place. They are a disobedient generation, children in whom is no faith. They have moved Me to jealousy by that which is no god, and they have provoked Me to anger with their idols. I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation” (Deuteronomy 32:20-21).

The Wedding Garment

In Matthew’s account, an additional aspect is presented once everyone had come to the marriage feast: someone came without a wedding garment (Matthew 22:11-13). John Chrysostom interpreted⁸ this individual as someone with a corrupt life. Marriage customs of that day involved a weeklong feast at the home of the groom, where the groom’s parents usually presented each of the guests with a special garment. [It was at such a feast in Cana that Jesus performed His first public miracle – John 2:1-11]. The same imagery is used in Revelation referring to the saints, the martyrs and the faithful: they are given a special white garment (Revelation 3:4-5, 18; 6:9-11; 7:13-14). When the servants had gone out into the highways (and hedges), they brought in the good and the bad (Matthew 22:10). So it has been throughout the ages in the Church. Paul warned the Ephesian elders that savage wolves would come into their midst and heretics would arise from within their midst (Acts 20:29-30). Some examples⁹ of wolves rising from the midst of the Church,

⁸ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew*, LXIX, 2.

⁹ For Alexander, see 2 Timothy 4:15-16; for Phygellus and Hermogenes, see 2 Timothy 1:15; for Demas, see Colossians 4:14, 2 Timothy 4:10; for Nicholas of Antioch, see Acts 6:5, Revelation 2:6, 15; for Hymenaeus

that are mentioned in the New Testament, are Phygellus and Hermogenes, Demas and Nicolas of Antioch (all of the Seventy who apostatized), Alexander the Coppersmith, Hymenaeus and Philetus. Thus Paul encouraged everyone to examine himself before partaking of the Lord's Table (1 Corinthians 11:28-29) that we might clothe ourselves in the proper garment – a humble and contrite heart (Psalm 51:17, Isaiah 57:15), and that we might be prepared ourselves for the Great Supper and the Marriage Feast.

Irenaeus spoke¹⁰ of the wedding garment as being works of righteousness. Those who are cast into the outer darkness despise the proper wedding garment.

“Christ makes it clear that we ought, after our calling, to be adorned with works of righteousness, so that the Spirit of God may rest upon us. This is the wedding garment, of which the apostle speaks, ‘Not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life’ (2 Corinthians 5:4). But those who have been called to God's supper yet have not received the Holy Spirit, because of their wicked conduct ‘shall be cast into outer darkness’ (Matthew 22:13). He thus clearly shows that the same King who gathered, from all quarters, the faithful to the marriage of His Son, and who grants them the incorruptible banquet, also orders that man to be cast into outer darkness who doesn't have on a wedding garment; that is, one who despises it. For as in the Old Covenant, ‘with many of them was He not well pleased’ (1 Corinthians 10:5); so also is it the case here, that ‘many are called, but few chosen’” (Matthew 22:14).

Athanasius of Alexandria linked¹¹ the proper wedding garment to the grace of the Holy Spirit. The lack of the proper wedding garment implies drunkenness, wickedness, being inflamed by pleasures, and thirsting for the destruction of others.

“It becomes us then in these days of the Passover, to rise early with the saints, and approach the Lord with all our soul, with purity of body, with confession and godly faith in Him. When we have here first drunk, and are filled with these divine waters, which flow from Him, we may be able to sit at table with the saints in heaven, and may share in the one voice of gladness, which is there. From this sinners are rightly cast out, and hear the words, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?’ (Matthew 22:12) Sinners indeed thirst, but not for the grace of the Spirit. Being inflamed with wickedness, they are wholly set on fire by pleasures, as the Proverb says, ‘All day long he desires evil desires’ (Proverbs 21:26). But the Prophet cries against them, saying, ‘Woe to those who rise up early, and follow strong drink; who continue until the evening, for wine inflames them’ (Isaiah 5:11). And since they run wild in debauchery, they dare to thirst for the destruction of others”.

John Chrysostom stated¹² that the man without the proper wedding garment was invited to the feast, but he behaved with insolence toward his host. Faith is insufficient for us; if we don't

and Philetus, see 1 Timothy 1:18-20. Of these, Phygellus, Hermogenes, Demas and Nicolas of Antioch had been members of the original Seventy Apostles (Luke 10:1-20).

¹⁰ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, IV, xxxvi, 6.

¹¹ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Festal Letters*, XX, 2.

¹² John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John*, X, 3.

also show a pure life, we may suffer the same fate. Christ is not ashamed of beggars and those who live in squalor in this life; what matters is our behavior. If we don't adapt our behavior to the dignity of the feast, we cast ourselves out. Christ is obligated to cast out those who don't act properly, since it would insult everyone else present if He didn't.

“There is no small fear, lest having sometime defiled that beautiful robe by our sloth and transgressions, we are cast out from the inner room and bridal chamber, like the five foolish virgins, or him who did not have on a wedding garment (Matthew 25:1-12; 22:12). He too was one of the guests, for he had been invited. But after the invitation and so great an honor, he behaved with insolence towards Him who had invited him. Hear what punishment he suffers, how pitiful, a subject for many tears. For when he comes to partake of that splendid table, not only is he forbidden, but bound hand and foot, and carried into outer darkness, to undergo eternal and endless wailing and gnashing of teeth”.

“Therefore, beloved, let us not expect that faith is sufficient to us for salvation. If we do not show a pure life, but come clothed with garments unworthy of this blessed calling, nothing hinders us from suffering the same as that wretched one. It is strange that He, who is God and King, is not ashamed of men who are vile, beggars, and of no repute, but brings even them to that table. We show so much insensibility, as not even to be made better by so great an honor, but after our calling remain in our old wickedness, insolently abusing the unspeakable loving-kindness of Him who has called us. He did not call us to the spiritual communion of His mysteries that we should enter with our former wickedness. Instead, putting off our filthiness, we should change our clothing to such as becomes those who are entertained in palaces. But if we will not act worthy of that calling, this no longer rests with Him who has honored us, but with ourselves; it is not He that casts us out from that admirable company of guests, but we cast out ourselves”.

“He has done all His part. He has made the marriage; He has provided the table; He has sent men to call us; He has received us when we came, and honored us with all other honor. But when we have offered insult to Him, to the company, and to the wedding by our filthy garments, that is, our impure actions, we are then with good cause cast out. It is to honor the marriage and the guests that He drives off those bold and shameless persons. If He allowed those clothed in such a garment to stay, He would seem to be offering insult to the rest. May it never be that one of us finds this coming from Him who has called us! To this end have all these things been written before they come to pass; that we, being sobered by the threats of the Scriptures, may not suffer this disgrace and punishment”.

Athanasius of Alexandria noted¹³ that Judas came to the great supper, but despised it. The Prodigal Son, on the other hand, came back to the feast after he repented, and his father clothed him with an incorruptible garment.

“He who has been counted worthy of the heavenly calling, and by this calling has been sanctified, if he grows negligent in it, and although washed becomes defiled, ‘counting the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a profane thing, and despising the Spirit of grace’ (Hebrews 10:29), he hears the words, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?’ For the

¹³ Athanasius of Alexandria, *Festal Letters*, VII, 9-10.

banquet of the saints is spotless and pure; ‘for many are called, but few chosen’ (Matthew 22:14). Judas came to the supper, but because he despised it, went out from the presence of the Lord, and having abandoned his life, hanged himself (Matthew 27:5). But the disciples who continued with the Redeemer shared in the happiness of the feast. And that young man who went into a far country, and wasted his inheritance, living in dissipation, may receive a desire for this divine feast, and, comes to himself, saying, ‘How many hired servants of my father have bread to spare, while I perish here with hunger!’ He can rise and come to his father, and confess to him, saying, ‘I have sinned against heaven and before you, and am not worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired servants’ (Luke 15:17-19). When he thus confesses, then he shall be counted worthy of more than he prayed for. For the father does not receive him as a hired servant, neither does he look upon him as a stranger, but he kisses him as a son, brings him back to life as from the dead, counts him worthy of the divine feast, and gives him back his former precious robe. So that, on this account, there is singing and gladness in the paternal home”.

“This is the work of the Father’s loving-kindness and goodness. Therefore, instead of corruption, He clothes him with an incorruptible garment; instead of hunger, He kills the fatted calf; instead of far journeys, the Father watched for his return, providing shoes for his feet. What is most wonderful, He placed a divine signet ring upon his hand; by all these things He begot him again in the image of the glory of Christ. These are the gracious gifts of the Father, by which the Lord honors and nourishes those who abide with Him, and also those who return to Him and repent. For He promises, saying, ‘I am the bread of life; he that comes to Me shall not hunger, and he that believes on Me shall never thirst’ (John 6:35). We too shall be counted worthy of these things, if we cling to our Savior at all times, and if we are pure, not only in these six days of Pascha, but consider the whole course of our life as a feast. If we continue near and do not go far off, we say to Him, ‘You have the words of eternal life, and where shall we go?’ (John 6:68) Having first nourished the soul here, we shall partake with angels at that heavenly and spiritual table”.

The Binding Hand and Foot

Jesus stated, at the end of the parable, “But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So he said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast *him* into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 22:11-13).

In the parable, the king sent His servants out to bring in the good and the bad; but He didn’t expect the bad to remain bad forever. He expected them to learn from those around them in the Church. Cyril of Jerusalem described¹⁴ the fate of those who cannot or will not learn what the Master expects from observing their fellow members in the Church.

¹⁴ Cyril of Jerusalem, “Procatechesis”, 3, Catechetical Lectures.

“A certain man in the Gospels once pried into the marriage feasts (Matthew 22:12), and took an inappropriate garment, and came in, sat down, and ate; for the bridegroom permitted it. But when he saw them all clad in white, he ought to have assumed a garment of the same kind himself. He partook of the same food, but was unlike them in fashion and in purpose. The bridegroom, though bountiful, was discerning. In going around to each of the guests, he observed them, for his care was not for their eating, but for their appropriate behavior. He saw a stranger not having on a wedding garment, and said to him, ‘Friend, how did you come in here? In what a color! With what a conscience! Even though the doorkeeper didn’t forbid you, did you take advantage of the bountifulness of the entertainer? Were you ignorant of what fashion you should come in to the banquet? When you came in, you saw the glittering fashions of the guests; shouldn’t you have been taught by what was before your eyes? Shouldn’t you have retired then, that you might have entered again at an appropriate time? But now you have come in unseasonably, to be unseasonably cast out. So he commanded the servants, (1) ‘Bind his feet’, which dared to intrude; (2) ‘bind his hands’, which didn’t know how to put a bright garment around him; and (3) ‘cast him into the outer darkness’, for he is unworthy of the wedding torches¹⁵. You see what happened to that man; make your own condition safe”.

John Chrysostom compared¹⁶ the agony of being bound hand and foot with the reward for having our hearts and minds voluntarily bound to Christ.

“The blessed martyr Babylas¹⁷ was bound, for the same cause as John the Baptist also was, because he reproved a king in his transgression. This man when he was dying gave charge that his bonds should be laid with his body, and that the body should be buried bound. To this day the fetters lie mingled with his ashes, so devoted was his affection for the bonds he had worn for Christ’s sake. ‘He was laid in chains of iron’ as the Prophet says of Joseph (Psalm 105:17-18). Even women have been bound like this”.

“We however are not in bonds, nor am I recommending this, since now is not the time for them. We should bind not our hands, but bind our heart and mind. There are yet other bonds, and they that wear not the one, shall have to wear the other. Hear what Christ said, ‘Bind him hand and foot’ (Matthew 22:13). God forbid we should have trials with our hands or feet bound! But may He grant us to take our fill with our hearts and mind bound!”

¹⁵ The candidates for baptism, who were being educated by the Catechetical Lectures, carried torches as they came for baptism before Pascha. The atmosphere was like a bridal train as the candidates came forward.

¹⁶ John Chrysostom, Homilies on Ephesians, IX.

¹⁷ Babylas was a 3rd Century Sicilian priest who suffered with two of his disciples.