

INVITATION TO THE GREAT SUPPER

Rev. Grant H. Odhner

“A certain man gave a great supper and invited many (Luke 14:16).

Life comes with an invitation. Our Creator invites us to be joined with Him, and at the same time with others, in joyful harmony. This blessed union is described in our parable from Luke (as in other places in the Word) as a feast, as a great supper.

The Lord invites all to come to Him. Every human being is given an inner freedom and rationality that enable him or her to see the fundamental issues of good and evil and to choose heaven. So why, in Jesus’ parable, were only some invited to the feast? Even in a literal reading, it is clear that the privileged of the town who were invited refer to those Jews whom Jesus Himself was inviting to His kingdom, who were declining that invitation. They heard His message of salvation, yet remained unresponsive to it.

The reason why they received invitations first was that they had the Word. The Word bears the Lord’s invitation to us most clearly. Those who have the Word are especially privileged. This may seem unfair, viewed from our limited perspective. But we must realize that the very freedom that the Lord wants us to have would be compromised if He were to intervene and give the Word to each and every human being in this world. In His wisdom He touches people through people. Human freedom demands that the Word be spread in this way. This is the only way it can come to people in harmony with their freedom—when they can accept it and respond to it without Divine pressure (compare *Divine Providence* 254 and *Divine Love and Wisdom* 249).

In our parable, the master of the house “sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, ‘Come, for all things are now ready.’” Here we see the Lord, viewed as Divine love (the master of the house), sending forth His Divine Human (his servant). It is the Lord’s Divine Human (speaking through the Word’s truth) that communicates with us, and calls us to receive Divine blessings.

“But they all with one accord began to make excuses.” We generally make excuses in order to justify ourselves, to cast a more favorable light on actions that others might interpret as bad. Our hope is to change another’s perception of what we have done or are going to do. In many cases excuses are expressions not of what we regret doing, but of what we have chosen to do. So it is with the excuses made by the three guests in our parable. They represent not excuses but choices. Each one chooses to reject the invitation. Each prefers to do something else. In general, we’re told, their three responses express the preference for external (worldly) goods and satisfactions over internal (heavenly) ones; this preference makes them unreceptive to the heavenly joys that the Lord is offering (see *Apocalypse Explained* 1162).

The first invited guest said to the servant, “I have bought a field, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.” “Buying” here has a similar meaning to our slang usage of the word. When we say “I buy that idea,” we’re saying we accept the truth of it, we accept its validity, and

in effect we “own” it. In the Word, “buying” means acquiring something spiritual and making it our own.

A “field” in the Word stands for “doctrine.” Everyone has a doctrine—we could call it our “philosophy of life.” Our doctrine is the set of basic ideas that we “buy.” We view all things according to these ideas. By them we interpret reality; we make sense of our experience. Most importantly, these ideas interpret the Word for us. We understand the Word according to what we come to hold as most important and basic.

Our doctrine ideally comes from the Word. But we cannot help but get elements of it from other sources. This is particularly true the less regenerate we are, because our loves are what “buy into” the ideas that make up our guiding doctrine. And unregenerate loves find worldly ideas more appealing than heavenly ones.

A field stands for “doctrine,” because our doctrine or philosophy is the ground in which, and from which, we produce everything of our lives. It is the field in us which selectively accepts “seeds” from outside of us, nurtures them, and “bears fruit.”

In our parable the man’s “buying a field” directs our attention to the doctrine, or philosophy of life, that he has adopted as his own. His preferring to go and look at the field rather than coming to the feast indicates that he is “heavily invested” in a philosophy of life that places greater value in worldly and selfish pursuits than in heavenly ones. He prefers his own ideas, and the delights they allow him, over the delights that the Lord is offering through His Word. “I have bought a field, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused.”

And another said to the servant, “I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused.”

This excuse involves a preference for natural pleasures over heavenly ones. “Oxen” in the Word stand for natural affections and satisfactions—the delights of the body and its senses, the delights of natural companionship and social life, to name a few.

The man “bought five yoke of oxen.” “Five” in the Word usually means “a few,” “a little,” or “some.” Here it conveys the idea of how paltry and meager natural delights are in and of themselves. When the mind’s focus is spiritual, natural delights are enriched immeasurably—that is, when we have for our ends unselfish service of our neighbors, their long-term good, the common good. But getting to the point where our focus is spiritual involves a measure of self-discipline, self-criticism, and self-denial. Some people would prefer to turn down the invitation to spiritual happiness and pursue a shallow, fleeting natural happiness.

Now we might wonder why some people prefer to “invest” in meager natural delights. The fact is, although natural delights are fleeting and shallow, we can always foster the fantasy that they will yield us more. Even when we are continually let down by the actual results, this fantasy keeps our pursuit of natural pleasures interesting. So with the help of self-delusion some people do prefer to live in the spurious hope of fulfilled natural goals rather than work for the lasting

delights of spiritual life. So they excuse themselves from the Lord's banquet. "I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused."

And another said to the servant, "I have married a wife, and therefore cannot come." The first two people asked to be excused. This response is not really an excuse. The person simply says, "I cannot come." The three responses represent a progression. The first response represents a choice of a life philosophy; the second represents the choice of a natural life; this last represents the step of going on to confirm ourself in our choices.

The first two men had "bought" things—a field and five yoke of oxen. When we "buy" into a set of ideas, priorities, delights, eventually they become our own; they become "us." Our ideas become married to our intentions; the hopes we envision become married to our desires. Our character becomes solidified. "Marriage" in the Word refers to the spiritual marriage between our will and understanding. This marriage determines our essential character. The third man's saying, "I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come" signals the inability to perceive and experience the joys of spiritual life, due to the firm choice of evil. When we become 'confirmed' or "married" in selfish and worldly life-patterns, we are then unable to accept the Lord's invitation. We are unable because our loves have structured and oriented our life in such a different direction, toward such different goals. This is the ultimate rejection of the Lord. He is then unable to bless us.

Now the master in our parable becomes "angry" at this point. We must understand this anger spiritually. We become angry when our loves are frustrated and impeded. The Lord's all-seeing love cannot in itself be frustrated or impeded. Still it does no harm for us to think so at times! Think of the Lord's great desire to bless us! Think of His burning love for our eternal happiness! Think of the joy He feels in bringing this happiness to a willing human being! Then envision the rejection of this love. How can we help but imagine that the Lord is in some sense disappointed or sad, or even feels righteous anger?

In any case, the rest of the parable shows us that His love, though infinitely strong and passionate, is not frustrated. His "banquet" is filled. The urgency of His love, seen in the master's anger, is transferred into the picture of the servant "going out quickly" and "compelling" people in off the street.

And who are the ones who enjoy the Lord's feast?—"the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind."

"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance" (Mark 2:17). "Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh" (Luke 6:20t). Here we have the truth of the matter. It is only those who feel powerless and in need of the Lord's love and guidance that accept His invitation to heavenly life.

We cannot gain heaven by ourself. We don't need to suffer or become wretched per se. That's not what the Lord wants. But we do need to become humble enough to accept His leading. We

do have to gain a sense of our total reliance on Him—reliance on Him for the know-how to live aright, for the affections that are worthy and lasting. In a spiritual idea, this is what it is to be “poor”: to recognize our reliance on the Lord.

Our parable speaks also of “the maimed.” Is there anyone who becomes a spiritual person who has not been “maimed” at some point in his or her life? The “maimed” in the spiritual sense refers to those who have been deeply hurt by evils of life. Sometimes these evils result from our own deliberate choices. Sometimes they happen through no real fault of our own, but through outside factors—for example, through the false persuasions of our upbringing (compare *Arcana Coelestia* 4171f and 9171). “The maimed” and “the torn” in the Word symbolize people like this who basically mean well and want to do what is right, but can’t until they are healed. Such people gradually respond to the Lord’s leading in the measure that it becomes clear to them. They are willing to face their evils and deal with them regardless of whose fault they are to begin with.

“The lame” are also brought in to enjoy the Lord’s feast. “The lame” are those who are willing to recognize the impediments in their natural life (in their “feet” and “hands”) which are holding them back in their spiritual progress. Rather than defend a bad habit, they see it as a source of chronic pain, as something that causes them to stumble and limp along where they might otherwise be making spiritual headway. They are willing to turn to the Lord for the power to change.

“The blind,” too, do the same. They acknowledge their inability to see clearly. They acknowledge that they stumble in the dark without the Lord’s light. They humbly seek His help, and are willing to learn.

All these waifs are brought in to the feast by the servant. They are brought in off the streets and lanes, then off the highways and from along the fences. Here we see pictured the Lord’s work of salvation. Roads stand for truths which lead us to the Lord and to the good life. To be “on the road” is to be in a state of flux, to be willing and able to change and progress and be led by the truth. Only those who are on these “roads,” and who recognize their “sickness” and “need,” are able to receive the Lord’s love and wisdom. Those who are secure in their own homes, who are busy filling their own wants and needs out of their own storehouses, who are busy pursuing mammon, who turn to the Lord only when it’s convenient- these are “called” but are not “chosen.”

And so, to sum up our parable: our Lord invites us all to His feast and agrees that “Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!” (Luke 14:15) At the same time He says:

Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man’s sake. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven. . (Luke 6:20-23).

Amen.

Lessons: Isaiah 35; Luke 14:1-6,15-24; *Divine Providence* 27:2,3