



# HOLY TRINITY

## ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH



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# CHURCH BULLETIN

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## The 28th Sunday after Pentecost

### Gospel Reading Luke 14: 16 - 24

*The Lord said this parable:* "A man once gave a great banquet, and invited many; and at the time of the banquet he sent his servant to say to those who had been invited, 'Come; for all is now ready.' But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a field, and I go out and see it; I pray you, have me excused.' And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I must go to examine them; I pray you, have me excused.' And another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.' So the servant came and

reported this to his master. Then the householder in anger said to his servant, 'Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and maimed and blind and lame.' And the servant said, 'Sir, what you commanded has been done, and there is still room.' And the master said to the servant, 'Go out to the highways and hedges, and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet. For many are called, but few are chosen.'"

### Apostle Reading Colossians 3: 14- 11

*Brethren*, giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heav-

en and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.

Synaxarion. Sunday December 12, 2021 (The 28<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost - All Forefathers Sunday - fish allowed): Holy Hierarch Spyridon the Wonderworker of Trymithus; Saint Mardarije of Libertyville and Chicago

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## Homily on the Forefathers of Christ

Today the herald of the Feast of the Nativity bids us be attentive: Today is the Sunday of the Forefathers of Christ — the 11th hour of Advent: the Lord is coming!

This Sunday the Lord invites us to recall his earthly forefathers, both those before the Law and those after the Law of Moses. On this day, we begin to ponder in advance of the Feast what it means that God took on human flesh and human nature and became one of

His own creation, adding Himself to the genealogy of that created human order He Himself called into being by His own Word.

The list of those ancestors of Christ — the forefathers — contains a list of the “who’s who” of the Old Testament — Saints and sinners alike, men and even women who were either sinners or foreigners. The women point to the prominent place that they will play in mankind’s redemption through the Virgin Mary, the new Eve, and the women disciples of the Lord. Underscored here is that Christ came to redeem all of humanity, human nature itself, in order to create a new race of Adam — not one based on gender, race, place, or time, but one grounded in the firm and eternal foundation that is our identity in Christ God.

Already, even before He sent out His disciples to preach the good news to “all nations”, Christ Himself hails, in part, from Gentile seed. The Jew of Jews, St. Paul, reminds us of this truth in today’s Epistle, saying, “there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.” (Col. 3:11).

We who worship here today are inheritors of this promise that God made to Abraham when He declared, “in your seed, all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 26:4). Many Jews saw this promise as given purely through the Abrahamic blood line, grounded in this world and, in turn, partaking of the fallen race of Adam.

But God had something greater in mind: the renewal and regeneration of the human race where everyone is called.



No one is excluded from the calling to be renewed with Christ, the new Adam, to become a co-heir with Him. In Matthew’s genealogy Christ’s ancestors include both righteous and un-righteous, faithful kings and murderers, Jews and Gentiles, kings and peasants, men and women. The hallmark of all is cooperation with the work of God through faith, cooperation with the Holy Spirit’s work in our lives, faith.

It’s not the sum of their sins, but the faithfulness of the forefathers’ repentance which is remembered and summed up in Psalm 50, “a broken and humbled heart God will not despise.” The Prophet and King David, who composed this Psalm from the depths of his soul, repenting of murder and adultery, testifies to this truth. For this reason, we pray this psalm every morning that we may remember repentance and remember God’s gracious forgiveness.

But what if we don’t avail ourselves of this great gift of God’s mercy? What if we keep putting off repentance out of fear, which is, in reality, a form of pride, of over reliance on self and not on God. What if we buy into the consumerism and materialism of our present world and forget God and our calling in Him? What if we begin to take God’s grace and love for granted, this greatest of gifts, which is our new life in the human nature which Christ has renewed? Today’s Gospel is an invitation but it’s also a warning to not take God’s mercy and love for granted. All are called, but not all choose to be among the chosen of God. If we refuse, others will come in our place. God’s life is never forced upon us; we can choose death, that is, apartness from God and His life.

Those who reject the fullness of the life in Christ are not worthy of that life. Jesus says, “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). He calls on us who thirst, to come and drink (John 7:37). And, most audaciously, Christ says, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice, I will come into him and dine with him and he with Me.”



How do we dare despise this invitation to share in koinonia with the King, our Creator, our Savior?

God loves us too much to hold back from warning us beforehand of the consequences of neglecting His gracious invitation, of disavowing ourselves of communion with the Life that He alone is, as He does with this parable of the great supper in today's Gospel.

St. Paul too, for his part, warns us specifically of some of the passions that will keep us from this life in the Kingdom with God if we do not turn from them, saying, "therefore, put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

Now is the time for repentance. Now is the time to make confession and renew our baptism in Christ. Now is the time to prepare for His coming. Advent is meant to spur us on to make our souls ready to greet Christ when He comes, as we prepare to receive Him in the Eucharist of the Feast and as we await His glorious and Second Coming.

Now is the time for us to rouse ourselves to action—to repent in word and deed. We, for our part, make ready to receive the King of all, humbly born in a manger in a cave for our salvation that He may make us humble, in turn, to teach us the way of true courage, humility, dying to self that we may live for Him and with Him for all eternity. Christ is coming again to judge the living and the dead, and each one of us.

So let us rouse ourselves from all spiritual lethargy, all fear all pride, to live lives reflective of the new creation we've become in Christ, "where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all."

We are called to continue to grow through deification. Let us repent with sincerity of heart, that we may with good conscience, receive Christ God at His glorious nativity.

Christ God is here, in our midst, ready to welcome us to His supper, ready to dine with us, to commune with us, to heal us, to make us whole. May we say "YES!" to God's gracious invitation and make ready our souls to receive the King of kings and Lord of lords, who has become incarnate in the flesh by the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary for our sake and that of the entire human race.

**Fr. Robert Miclean**

(Source: <https://www.orthodoxannapolis.org>)



## **HOLY TRINITY'S Liturgical Schedule from December 12 to December 19, 2021**

### **Sunday December 12 (28th Sunday after Pente- cost - fish allowed):**

9:00 am - Matins

10:00 am - Divine Liturgy

11:00 am - Sunday School

12:00 pm - Coffee Hour

### **Sunday December 19 (Sunday before the Nativity of Our Lord):**

9:00 am - Matins

10:00 am - Divine Liturgy

11:00 am - Sunday School

12:00 pm - Coffee Hour



## Please R.S.V.P.

This week's Gospel lesson is the Parable of the Great Banquet (Luke 14:16-24). St. Matthew also has an account of this same parable (22:1-4) that we hear on the 14th Sunday after Pentecost. However, while both Evangelists relate a similar story, the different contexts in which they are placed shifts the focus of the parable. St. Matthew places his account of the

Wedding Feast in a sequence of other parables that Jesus spoke intending to challenge the hypocrisy of the religious authorities of his time. St. Luke places his account in the context of Jesus teaching about humility and hospitality.

In trying to explain what the Kingdom of Heaven is like, Jesus uses the image of a Great Banquet. In an earlier part of this chapter (v. 8-9), he says, "When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down in the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host, and the host who invited both of you may come and say, 'Give up your place to this man.' And then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place." He goes on to say that "all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted" (v. 11).

Jesus then moves on to speak about hospitality. He says, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case that they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you" (v. 12-14).

Very often we struggle to understand what St. Paul means when he says, "by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8). In the Lord's teaching on hospitality we gain an insight into what St. Paul means when he says we have been saved "by grace." When we read this parable many of us perhaps identify with the host who extends the invitation and is turned-down by his guests. But, in actuality, we are the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind who have been invited to the banquet. We are the ones who do not have the ability to repay. We have a place at the table only because of God's grace and His love.



This Parable of the Great Banquet can be very helpful for us as we prepare for the Feast of the Lord's Birth. When the Lord wants to show us what the Kingdom of God is like, he gives us joyful images like a banquet (Luke 14:16), or a wedding feast (Matthew 22:1), or a bridal chamber (Matthew 25:1, John 3:29).

He also gives us transformative images like yeast (Luke 13:20), or the mustard seed (Luke 13:18). He wants us to see the Kingdom of God as something that will bring happiness to our lives even as we are changed by it.

And, who does God send to extend his invitation for us to attend this Banquet? God sends the invitation in the form of His Son, who embodies the very humility he preaches to us. This Son does not take the first seat, but the last. He does not impose himself, but comes as a vulnerable child. And showing us what he means by hospitality, he invites not only the rich and powerful, but also the lowly and the unimportant, the meek and the poor.

We all know it is hard to focus on the spiritual importance of the holiday. During this time of year we are wittingly or unwittingly distracted from responding to the Lord's invitation as we should. We are preoccupied with family and social obligations. There are decorations to hang and gifts to buy. Commercial interests conspire to twist the miracle of Christ's birth to increase the bottom line. Yet still, neither are we captives nor victims. We can choose. This is the point of the Parable. People were invited to feast at God's table yet they chose the distractions of life over the joy of the Kingdom.

We are invited to the Feast, but if we choose not to attend, the Banquet Hall will not remain empty. The Lord will fill His House, and He will fill it as it pleases Him (v. 23). We should take care not to be blinded by the frenzy of the season, and as a result reject the invitation offered us. Rather, we should actively seek out refuge in that quiet cave in Bethlehem, where rests a young child, the pre-eternal God.

**Father Nicholas Apostola**



# Saint Spyridon the Wonderworker, Bishop of Tremithus

Saint Spyridon of Tremithus was born towards the end of the third century on the island of Cyprus. He was a shepherd, and had a wife and children. He used all his substance for the needs of his neighbors and the homeless, for which the Lord rewarded him with a gift of wonderworking. He healed those who were incurably sick, and cast out demons.

After the death of his wife, during the reign of Constantine the Great (306-337), he was made Bishop of Tremithus, Cyprus. As a bishop, the saint did not alter his manner of life, but combined pastoral service with deeds of charity.

According to the witness of Church historians, Saint Spyridon participated in the sessions of the First Ecumenical Council in the year 325. At the Council, the saint entered into a dispute with a Greek philosopher who was defending the Arian heresy. The power of Saint Spyridon's plain, direct speech showed everyone the importance of God's wisdom before human wisdom: "Listen, philosopher, to what I tell you. There is one God Who created man from dust. He has ordered all things, both visible and invisible, by His Word and His Spirit. The Word is the Son of God, Who came down upon the earth on account of our sins. He was born of a Virgin, He lived among men, and suffered and died for our salvation, and then He arose from the dead, and He has resurrected the human race with Him. We believe that He is one in essence (consubstantial) with the Father, and equal to Him in authority and honor. We believe this without any sly rationalizations, for it is impossible to grasp this mystery by human reason."

As a result of their discussion, the opponent of Christianity became the saint's zealous defender and later received holy Baptism. After his conversation with Saint Spyridon, the philosopher turned to his companions and said, "Listen! Until now my rivals have presented their arguments, and I was able to refute their proofs with other proofs. But instead of proofs from reason, the words of this Elder are filled with some sort of special power, and no one can refute them, since it is impossible for man to oppose God. If any of you thinks as I do now, let him believe in Christ and join me in following this man, for God Himself speaks through his lips."



At this Council, Saint Spyridon displayed the unity of the Holy Trinity in a remarkable way. He took a brick in his hand and squeezed it. At that instant fire shot up from it, water dripped on the ground, and only dust remained in the hands of the wonderworker. "There was only one brick," Saint Spyridon said, "but it was composed of three elements. In the Holy Trinity there are three Persons, but only one God."

The saint cared for his flock with great love. Through his prayers, drought was replaced by abundant rains, and incessant rains were replaced by fair weather. Through his prayers the sick were healed and demons cast out.

A woman once came up to him with a dead child in her arms, imploring the intercession of the saint. He prayed, and the infant was restored to life. The mother, overcome with joy, collapsed lifeless. Through the prayers of the saint of God, the mother was restored to life.

Another time, hastening to save his friend, who had been falsely accused and sentenced to death, the saint was hindered on his way by the unanticipated flooding of a stream. The saint commanded the water: "Halt! For the Lord of all the world commands that you permit me to cross so that a man may be saved." The will of the saint was fulfilled, and he crossed over happily to the other shore. The judge, apprised of the miracle that had occurred, received Saint Spyridon with esteem and set his friend free.

Similar instances are known from the life of the saint. Once, he went into an empty church, and ordered that the lampadas and candles be lit, and then he began the service. When he said, "Peace be unto all," both he and the deacon heard from above the resounding of a great multitude of voices saying, "And with thy spirit." This choir was majestic and more sweetly melodious than any human choir. To each petition of the litanies, the invisible choir sang, "Lord, have mercy." Attracted by the church singing, the people who lived nearby hastened towards it. As they got closer and closer to the church, the wondrous singing filled their ears and gladdened their hearts. But when they entered into the church, they saw no one but the bishop and several church servers, and they no longer heard the singing which had greatly astonished them.



Saint Simeon Metaphrastes (November 9), the author of his *Life*, likened Saint Spyridon to the Patriarch Abraham in his hospitality. Sozomen, in his *Church History*, offers an amazing example from the life of the saint of how he received strangers. One time, at the start of the Forty-day Fast, a stranger knocked at his door. Seeing that the traveller was very exhausted, Saint Spyridon said to his daughter, “Wash the feet of this man, so he may recline to dine.” But since it was Lent there were none of the necessary provisions, for the saint “partook of food only on certain days, and on other days he went without food.” His daughter replied that there was no bread or flour in the house. Then Saint Spyridon, apologizing to his guest, ordered his daughter to cook a salted ham from their larder. After seating the stranger at table, he began to eat, urging that man to do the same. When the latter refused, calling himself a Christian, the saint rejoined, “It is not proper to refuse this, for the Word of God proclaims, ‘Unto the pure all things are pure’” (Titus 1:15).

Another historical detail reported by Sozomen, was characteristic of the saint. It was his custom to distribute one part of the gathered harvest to the destitute, and another portion to those having need while in debt. He did not take a portion for himself, but simply showed them the entrance to his storeroom, where each could take as much as was needed, and could later pay it back in the same way, without records or accountings.

There is also the tale by Socrates Scholasticus about how robbers planned to steal the sheep of Saint Spyridon. They broke into the sheepfold at night, but here they found themselves all tied up by some invisible power. When

morning came the saint went to his flock, and seeing the tied-up robbers, he prayed and released them. For a long while he advised them to leave their path of iniquity and earn their livelihood by respectable work. Then he made them a gift of a sheep and sending them off, the saint said kindly, “Take this for your trouble, so that you did not spend a sleepless night in vain.”



All the Lives of the saint speak of the amazing simplicity and the gift of wonderworking granted him by God. Through a word of the saint the dead were awakened, the elements of nature tamed, the idols smashed. At one point, a Council had been convened at Alexandria by the Patriarch to discuss what to do about the idols and pagan temples there. Through the prayers of the Fathers of the Council all the idols fell down except one, which was very much revered. It was revealed to the Patriarch in a vision that this idol had to be shattered by Saint Spyridon of Tremithus. Invited by the Council, the saint set sail on a ship, and at the moment the ship touched shore and the saint stepped out on land, the idol in Alexandria with all its

offerings turned to dust, which then was reported to the Patriarch and all the bishops.

Saint Spyridon lived his earthly life in righteousness and sanctity, and prayerfully surrendered his soul to the Lord. His relics repose on the island of Corfu (Kerkyra), in a church named after him (His right hand, however, is located in Rome).

His memory is also celebrated on Cheesefare Saturday.

(Source: <https://www.oca.org/saints/lives/>)