

April 12, 2020

Dear Holy Archangel Michael's Serbian Orthodox Church Community in Hibbing, MN,

Behold! The Bridegroom (Jesus Christ) comes in the middle of the night. Blessed is he or she whom He shall find watching!

As we begin to celebrate the famous Bridegroom Matins during the first few nights of Holy Week I would like to draw something to our attention. In most, if not all, Orthodox Christian homes we keep a vigil lamp burning before an icon of Christ. This vigil lamp usually has olive oil and a flaming wick that floats atop the oil. The vigil lamp symbolizes our hearts and how they are always burning for God. The oil in the lamp represents God's mercy and if we keep asking for His mercy, and acquiring it, we will have plenty of grace to keep the flame of our heart going. The flame of our heart cannot keep burning without God's mercy, just as we can do nothing without God.

Of course we all know the famous biblical passage from which we derive the Bridegroom services:

"Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh (Matt. 25 1-13)."

Therefore, as we begin Holy Week, let us all honestly ask ourselves, do we have enough oil in our lamps? Or, should we be asking God for more oil/mercy? Even if we are "sheltering in place" due to COVID-19, and cannot attend services, may God allow us to believe that we are praying together. Together we can repeatedly implore Him: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Have mercy on me a sinner.

May the Bridegroom, our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ, find all of us watching.

With the blessings of God,
Father Constantine "Dean" Franck