

*The two invitations* (Exodus 24:3-11; John 6:1-15;)

\* Friends, without many words I say that people do like holidays. In addition to that there are one or two holidays you may like the most. As for me, when I was a student in junior school, I enjoyed *November 7* as a favorite. That holiday was observed enthusiastically by my former countrymen as the Birthday of the Soviet Republic. I did like it because of the seven days of vocation, the big military parade, and the fun I had with my cousins. Ah, I almost forgot, there also was tasty food. I liked *November 7* mostly due to the one week of vocation, a time for fun, and a tasty baking-powder biscuit. I was less a patriot comparing with an ultimate consumer of fun. Surely we would not like so much the 4<sup>th</sup> of July in the absence of the same things.

\* Friends, the subject I chose to preach relates to the celebration of a holiday. Frankly it is not about Russian or American national holidays; it is about a holiday we might love the most. And why is that special? There would be no problem to answer that if people practice only one special; but if there are two specials a man needs to make a choice; otherwise, he may fall between two stools.

\* Thinking over the texts of our Sunday readings, we may be troubled to find a solution. At first glance it seems there is no answer. But we are not helpless in making a choice between good and what is better. Let's ask the Lord for help and guidance, (Joh 14:26). We pray, *Dear Father we employ You, make our hearts be capable to embrace your love toward us to an even greater degree than love of any others so that we keep on in high regard what is yours; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord. Amen.*

\* In fact, the days off, parades, fireworks, and delicious food make the national holidays more attractive. Those pleasures naturally integrate into any holidays including holidays mentioned in the Bible. Significantly, all Jewish feasts were followed with having a meal. The two readings for today speak of this matter. Specifically, (Ex 24:3-11) and (Joh 6:1-15) tell about the feeding of 73 men on the mountain Sinai and the feeding of 5000 hungry men in Palestine. On both occasions people ate meals in the presence of the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ!

\* Thinking over the meaning of eating food as an essential part of all Jewish feasts we found that there are two different meals; let's label them as the sacrificial meal and the festive meal. The sacrificial meal belonged to the *Peace Offerings* that were allowed to be eaten by the priest (representing God's acceptance) and by the worshiper including his guests, (Deut. 12:18; 16:11). A number of regulations concerning eating the sacrificial meal

convey spiritual benefits, not merely a material pleasure, (Num 28). For example, at the Passover meal a lamb was roasted on the fire and eaten at night. Jews shall eat it with unleavened bread, bitter herbs and none of its parts shall remain. The family shall eat a lamb quickly, being ready to go, (Exo 12:8-11). On the other hand, the festive meal was eaten for pleasure. It came along with traditional arrangements. From that time until now the eating and drinking belong to an enjoyable part of any feasts. For example, if there were weddings, (John 2:1-11), or birthday parties, ( Luke 15:22-32; Mr. 6:21-23), the host greeted the guests with a kiss, provided them with the washing of feet and anointed their heads with oil. Guests were seated by age or importance. They enjoyed tasty and plenty food that came with music, singing and dancing.

\* Friends, after specifying these two types of meals, I ask you for an answer. Don't be afraid, it's just a rhetorical question. Here it is: If referring to our Sunday readings, then, what kind of meal do you think people had? There are two options, sacrificial or festive meal. When I worked on this sermon I looked the same questions up in several commentaries. Some of them state that after coming near to God, Moses and the elders ate and drank a **sacrificial meal**. For instance, the Concordia Self-Study Bible and Catholic Fireside Study Bible comment with one accord. This meal *foreshadows the Lord Supper which celebrates the new covenant sealed by Christ's death, (1Cor 11:25-26)*, says Concordia ... Bible; and *it is partake of the sacrificial meal*, says the Catholic ... Bible. In other words, logically, the commentators might imagine that Moses took a leftover from the Peace Offerings, also he took some drink and with seventy two men went up to the mountain. In that location they saw God and they ate and drank in his presence. Then the commentators say that this eating and drinking point to the future, particularly toward the eating and drinking that relate to the Lord Supper. Therefore this meal stands for sacrificial, they say.

\* Friends, don't hurry to agree with the official commentaries on this matter. Here it is an alternative remark. Our text narrates that the *Burn Offerings* and *Peace Offerings* were made according to given instruction, (Exo 24:5-8). The Mosaic Law says the sacrificial meal must be eaten by the worshipers at the altar, in the presence of God, (Deu 12:18). Though our text doesn't narrate the particular moment of eating the Covenant meal, it certainly was eaten; it was eaten by all Israelites including Moses and the elders at the same place where *Peace Offerings* were made. The participation in eating that covenant meal indicated the peaceful agreement between God and his elect; by virtue of this agreement the elders were enabled to go up to the very presence of God. Certainly the elders didn't

come up to eat sacrificial food again; certainly the Lord Himself provided them food and drink. Friends, it shouldn't surprise us, God can do it! Contrary to the common view, I am pretty sure that the meal in (Ex 24:11) was the festive meal, the meal of great joy of saved people. The elders saw God and they didn't die, (Exo 24:11). That meal was a joyful pretest of eternal bliss. God invited Moses and the elders to the feast as a joyful pretest of **another invitation**, (Ps 107: 2-9; Mat 8:11; Rev 7:9-17).

\* Now, what can we say about the account of the feeding 5000? Do you think it was the sacrificial or festive food? If you are not sure, let's hear what the official commentaries say on this account. They say that *it pointed to the Son of Man and the food for eternal life*, another commentary says that *it was seen as the anticipating of Eucharist and the final banquet in the kingdom*. Here Jesus can be seen as the supplier of human need, he is the bread of life, (Joh 6:35). The William Neil commentary says that this feeding was the proclamation of salvation for Jews (the five loaves point to the Five books of Torah and twelve baskets point to the twelve tribe of Israel) meanwhile the parallel feeding of the four thousand, (Mar 8:4-9), illustrates the proclamation of salvation for Gentiles (the seven fishes and seven baskets is the number of the seven nations conquered by Israel in Palestine). Reflecting on these commentaries and on the euphuistical text from (Joh 6:47-58), with a certain degree of truth we can say that it was a pretest of the sacrificial meal. That multiple bread itself was not sacrificial but it pointed to the Bread of Life we eat in the Lord Supper. *This is the bread that came down from heaven, not as the fathers ate and died. Whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.*

\* Drawing closer to the conclusion we should not miss the central point. **Significantly, today we gathered together to celebrate our salvation in Christ Jesus with two kind of meals, sacrificial and festive.** Soon after we will receive the sacrificial meal, the very body and blood of our Lord, given under, in, and with bread and wine. The order of actions in the feeding of 5000 (took bread, ... blessed, broke and gave) identically refer to the Lord Supper. But it is not the end of the story of our salvation.

\* Friends, saying again, don't hurry to get out from the Lord's house; don't miss the second meal! Like Moses and the seventy two with him we also are welcomed! Contrary to contemporary practice, where the festive meal has been turned into the Bible class with doughnuts, we anticipate another table that soon will come in view. It has been served with delicious chicken soup, pecans cinnamon rolls, whole grain bread, raw honey and organic green tea;

coffee is also available. Friends, seriously, the significance of the event we are going to celebrate soon is much worthy than, let say, the Day of Independence, even if that one comes with a day off, fireworks and delicious food accompanied with your relatives. But the significance of the Day we are celebrating now cannot be compared with any other occurrences, even with the Bible class. The Divine Liturgy, in which we are participants, ties you with the Blessed Trinity and with all the company of saints in heaven and on earth; it ties you with eternity. The two meals have been integrated in this Feast and prepared by the Lord exclusively for you, my dear Friends. Today you celebrate the Day of your salvation in Christ Jesus! And if it is your favorite, you would never miss the point. *A multitude comes from the east and the west to sit at the Feast of salvation with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the blest, obeying the Lord invitation. Have mercy upon us, O Jesus!* (LSB # 510).

*Beloved, grace and peace to all of you in Christ Jesus!*

*Amen*