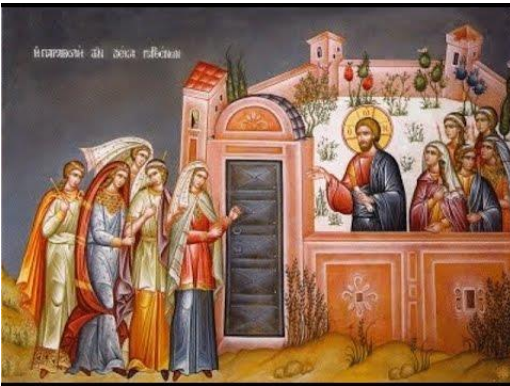


Good or Holy? (2)



In the previous article, we introduced the distinction between “goodness” and “holiness” by examining the story of the rich, young man. We learned from the story that “holiness” is caused by the dwelling of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, whereas “goodness” without holiness is insufficient – the topic that we will continue to discuss in this article as we analyze the parable of the ten virgins.

In the parable, five virgins were labeled wise because they brought oil with them to the wedding feast. The remaining five virgins were labeled foolish because, as the bridegroom was delayed, their lanterns began to run out of oil. In their last-minute panic to meet the bridegroom, the foolish virgins desperately asked the wise virgins for oil, but the wise refused saying, **“No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves”** (Matt. 25:9). As the foolish virgins went to

purchase oil, the bridegroom came and took the five wise virgins to the wedding banquet and forbade the foolish virgins from entering.

There are many lessons to learn from this parable that are relevant to our discussion of “holiness” and “goodness.” First note that the parable is called the parable of the five wise and five foolish virgins, not the five wise virgins and the five foolish *adulteresses*. The Lord may have called the foolish women “virgins” to indicate they were moral, decent, and “good” people. They are symbolic of those who are outwardly righteous and do amazing acts of charity, yet are lacking interior holiness. Even though they had kept themselves virgins for the bridegroom, they, like the young, rich man, were found lacking (cf. Matt. 19:20). Sadly, the “goodness” of the five foolish virgins was not able to get them into the wedding banquet.

Furthermore, note that the five foolish virgins were not allowed to enter because they lacked oil, but, interestingly, their lamps contained oil at the beginning of the story. It is written in Matt. 25: **“Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps”** (v. 3-4). Later, the foolish virgins asked of the wise saying, “Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out” (v. 8), which indicates that their lamps contained oil at one point. In this parable as in many others, oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit, so the fact that the five foolish virgins had oil demonstrates that were not only “good,” but at one point in their lives, they were “holy” too! Unfortunately, as they waited for the bridegroom, their oil was depleted, just as someone who was baptized and practiced the sacraments, but then over the course of their life, their holiness begins to fade because they chose to live away from God. Eventually, the Holy Spirit is quenched in the hearts (cf. 1 Thess. 5:19).

As good stewards of God, we should be like the five wise virgins who carried “vessel[s] of oil.” A “vessel of oil” means to be full of the Holy Spirit and to live a life of holiness. Being holy does not require one to perform miracles of healing or to pray the *Agpeya* in its entirety. On a practical level, a life of holiness begins by the continual acknowledgement of our sins and striving against the passions of the flesh. Once we realize our weaknesses, our dependency on God will increase, and, therefore, our prayers will be full of strength, resolve, and purpose. We will attend church, read the Bible, and pray and fast, not only because it is our habit, but because we are conscience of our shortcomings and are in desperate need of His grace. Then, because of His abundant mercy, **“we [will grow in our] love [for] Him because He first loved us”** (1 John 4:19). Therefore, it is only after knowing yourself and your faults, that you can be a holy person. The core of holiness is humility and the core of humility is to know yourself. The saints of our church dedicated their lives to prayer and fasting because they were very conscious of their sins. The sad irony is that those who are living in sin are sometimes the most unconscious of their sins, and those who would benefit the most from prayer and fasting are the ones who practice them the least. As we progress in our spiritual lives, the more sensitive we will become to sin and the more responsive we will become to God’s will for us to be a **“chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people...”** (1 Pet. 2:9).

Now that we have briefly defined “holiness,” in the next article, I will, God willing, present a philosophical argument for the need for absolute goodness in a post-modern society.

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