



How to Wear a Wedding Garment Every Day

There are times when we want to make sure that we are dressed appropriately for what we are doing. Some have to wear uniforms to work or school each day and will be disciplined if their clothing does not meet the standard. Most people develop a sense of what to wear for everything from athletic events to weddings and funerals. How we dress says something about our attitude toward what is going on and toward others, especially our host, our employer, or those we are gathering to honor or support.

If that is true for us today, it was all the more so for guests at a wedding in the first century, especially the wedding of the son of a king. It was the custom in those days for the host to supply each guest with a wedding garment, clothing suitable for the occasion. Consequently, no one in attendance could have a good excuse for not being dressed in a way that honored the host, the bride and groom, and marriage itself as a sign of God's blessings from generation to generation. It is understandable, then, that the king in the parable threw out the guest who was not wearing a wedding garment. For by neglecting to put on the garment he had been given, he was refusing to show respect for the celebration, much less to take part in it in a worthy manner.

Though we often overlook them, there are many times in the Bible when putting on particular kinds of clothing manifests our relationship with the Lord. Adam and Eve stripped themselves naked of the divine glory by turning away from God. As we chant in preparation for Theophany, Christ appeared in the waters of the Jordan in order to clothe the naked Adam with "the first robe," to restore fallen humanity and the entire creation as participants in His divine glory. Remember what St. Paul said of baptism, "As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." (Gal. 3:27) In the Orthodox baptismal service, the priest puts a white garment on the newly baptized person immediately after he or she comes out of the water with the words "the servant of God is clothed with righteousness..." Then the chanter sings "Grant to me the robe of light, O Most Merciful Christ our God, Who clothes Yourself with light as with a garment."

The connection to today's parable is clear. The wedding garment is our baptismal garment, our putting on Christ, our participation in the healing and blessing of humanity that He has brought to the world. The Savior so often used a wedding feast as a sign of the Kingdom of God. The Book of Revelation presents the marriage banquet of the Lamb as the fulfillment of all things. Christ is the Groom and the Church is His Bride. In every Divine Liturgy, we enter mystically into that heavenly celebration, that eternal wedding banquet that is the salvation of the world.

The question for each of us, then, is whether we are living in a way that is appropriate to our exalted identity as participants in this great banquet. Do we act, think, speak, and believe in ways that fit with the beautiful garments Christ has given us? Of course, He Himself is our garment for we have put Him on in baptism. Through the God-Man, we become true participants in the divine nature, nourished by His own Body and Blood. We are not only guests at the wedding, but the ones being united to the Lord in a deep, binding covenant that changes our very identity. As always, God's salvation is personal and organic, fulfilling His gracious intentions ever since He made us male and female in His image and likeness.

The man in the parable had much less responsibility than we do. He had simply been part of the crowd, the good and bad, invited to a wedding on a given day. He would have worn the wedding garment for a



short period of time, and doing so would have given him no obligations once the celebration was over. In contrast, our baptismal garment gives us a profound responsibility throughout our lives to live in a way that shines with the divine glory, that radiates the light of Christ to a world so filled with darkness, death, and despair. By putting on Christ, we accept a calling to do and say only those things that reflect His holiness, that flow from His righteousness and love. It is not enough simply to be baptized, for we must embrace the new life the Lord has given us and do all that we can to grow up spiritually into “the full stature of Christ.” (Eph. 4:13)

There are many kinds of uniforms that demand something of those who wear them. For example, soldiers and officers of public safety do not represent only themselves, especially when they wear their uniforms. They must follow codes of behavior that give them legal duties that the rest of us do not have to the point laying down their lives. When others run away from danger, they must run right into the thick of it. Athletes and musicians often wear uniforms, which identify them as people who accept a certain discipline and take on a new identity. Those who do not respect what their uniform stands for do not respect what their organization is about. In any demanding group endeavor worth its salt, people like that must eventually get with the program or find something else to do with their time and energy.

There is a parallel truth in the Christian life. We are members of the Body of Christ and must all work together for our collective health and well-being. A wedding celebration is a social event, and so is the Divine Liturgy. We do not commune with the Lord as isolated individuals, but as living members of Him and one another. We show our faithfulness not simply by what we do for a couple of hours on Sunday morning, but most profoundly by whether we live as those who have put on Christ every day of the week, when we are not at Church and are wearing other uniforms or performing other tasks not usually associated with religion. No matter where we are, how we are dressed, or what we are doing, we still wear the robe of light given us by our Savior. We are never off-duty or out of season as followers of Jesus Christ, and we must live accordingly. If we do not intentionally struggle to do so, we disgrace our high calling and risk excluding ourselves from the Kingdom.

At the end of the day, we must extend the holy joy of the Divine Liturgy into everyday life. That means making our time at work, school, home, and elsewhere an extension of the heavenly banquet, an offering of ourselves and world to the One Who is the source of life itself and all our other blessings. It means that we must clothe not only one small sliver of ourselves with Christ, but every aspect of our life in the world. We must not go around half naked spiritually or pretend that holiness concerns only one day of the week. The Second Adam has come to restore the entire creation, turning the water of our most mundane tasks into the wine of His glory. He wants us to celebrate and participate in the heavenly banquet every day of our lives. We will be able to do so only if we act as those who worthily wear a robe of light, as those whose true uniform is the baptismal gown, the wedding garment of heaven.