

SYNAXARIA OF THE TRIODION

by Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos

GREAT TUESDAY

On Holy and Great Tuesday, we commemorate the Parable of the Ten Virgins in the Holy Gospel.

Verses

Great Tuesday bringeth us ten virgins,
Who win a victory from the impartial Master.

Synaxarion

As our Lord Jesus Christ was going up to Jerusalem to endure His suffering, He told such parables as this to His Disciples, while addressing others to the Jews. He related the Parable of the Ten Virgins in order to encourage almsgiving, teaching, at the same time, that we should all be ready before our end. For since He had expounded much to them about virginity and eunuchs, and since virginity has great glory (for it is truly a great thing), in order that one who has accomplished this virtue might not neglect the others, and especially that of almsgiving, which causes the lamp of virginity to resplend, the Holy Gospel introduces this Parable of the Ten Virgins.

Christ calls five of them wise, since they possessed the oil of almsgiving in great abundance together with virginity. But five of them He calls foolish, because although they had virginity, they lacked the corresponding virtue of almsgiving. For this reason they were foolish, because having achieved what is greatest, they neglected the lesser, differing thereby in no respect from harlots. For harlots are overcome by the body, whereas these foolish virgins were overcome by money.

Now that the night of the present life had run its course, all of the Virgins slumbered; that is, they died, for death is called sleep. While they were sleeping, a cry was uttered around the middle of the night, "Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him," and the wise virgins, displaying an abundance of oil, entered with the Bridegroom when the doors of the bridal chamber were opened. The foolish virgins, however, not having sufficient oil, went in search of it after waking from sleep. Although the wise virgins were willing to give them oil, they were unable to do so before entering the bridal chamber, and responded thus: "Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell"—that is, the

poor— “and buy for yourselves” (St. Matthew 25:9). But this was not easy, since after death it is not possible either to give or to receive alms, as Abraham states in the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus. The foolish virgins, approaching the bridal chamber in darkness, cried out as they knocked on the doors, saying: “Lord, Lord, open to us.” But the Lord Himself pronounced that dread sentence: “Go away; I know you not.” How can you see the Bridegroom when you do not have the dowry of almsgiving?

This is why the God-bearing Fathers assigned the foregoing parable to be read at this point in Great Week, for it teaches us always to be vigilant and ready to meet the true Bridegroom through good deeds, and especially almsgiving, since the day and hour of our end is uncertain. Likewise, through the story of Joseph we are taught to strive for chastity, and through that of the fig tree to bring forth spiritual fruit. For he who accomplishes a single virtue, even if it be the greatest, while overlooking the others—and in particular, almsgiving—will not enter with Christ into eternal rest, but will be turned back in disgrace. There is, indeed, nothing more pitiful or ignominious than virginity that has succumbed to love of money.

Yea, O Christ the Bridegroom, number us with the wise virgins, join us to Thine elect flock, and have mercy on us. Amen.

