

Nisan 14 ~ The Last Supper

Part III: I Go to Prepare a Place for You

It was shortly after Jesus washed His disciples' feet in a ceremonial *mikveh* that He introduces another theme of the Jewish wedding tradition, that is, after the *Eyrusin* ceremony, the bridegroom would return to his father's house.

After the betrothal ceremony the groom and bride would return to their respective homes for a period of about one year, but not less than nine months. During this time the groom would spend the year preparing a house for his bride and future children after their marriage. Usually, this might be a structure built onto his father's house. The bride spent her time preparing her beautiful wedding dress. For both the groom and bride Eyrusin was a time of preparation, introspection, prayer, and sanctification. (from my essay, The Eyrusin in Come, Let Me Show You the Bride)



The Return of the Bridegroom from the "Ten Virgins" by Eugene Burnard (1850-1921)

Adding further credence to the idea that the Last Supper was not only a Passover *seder*, but also a *Eyrusin* ceremony are the words of Jesus explaining this very aspect of the traditional Jewish wedding:

¹“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me. ²In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If there were not, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be. (John 14:1-3)

Jesus reassures His disciples that He will come back for them and “take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be.” In the Jewish wedding tradition it would be the father of the Bridegroom that would tell his son that it was time to retrieve his bride. Whereas the *Eyrusin* ceremony was conducted in the mother-of-the-bride's house the wedding would be held at the father of the bridegroom's house. Only the father knew the day and the hour in which he would send his son, and the bride would not receive advanced warning of the coming of the bridegroom. Since the bride did not know when the bridegroom would be coming to take her to his father's house for the wedding ceremony (*Nissuin*), she instructed her bride maids to keep watch. The traditional Jewish

wedding ceremony is called the *Nissuin*, which means “to carry” which apply describes the bridegroom coming “to carry” his bride back to his father's house.

All of this makes beautiful sense, doesn't it? It was just the day before on the Mount of Olives that Jesus' told his disciples the Parables of the Wise and Foolish Bridesmaids.

“Then the kingdom of heaven shall be compared to ten maidens who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. ² Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. ³ For when the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; ⁴ but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. ⁵ As the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. ⁶ But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Behold, the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ ⁷ Then all those maidens rose and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ And the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ ⁹ But the wise replied, ‘Perhaps there will not be enough for us and for you; go rather to the dealers and buy for yourselves.’ ¹⁰ And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast; and the door was shut. ¹¹ Afterward the other maidens came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ ¹² But he replied, ‘Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.’ ¹³ Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour. (Matt 25:1-13)

This “carrying away” of the bride was not only described by Jesus in the previous chapter of Matthew, but also by prophets of the Old Testament; this was the “great and terrible day of the Lord” that would occur at the “end of the age.”

²⁹ “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken; ³⁰ then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, **and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven**

with power and great glory;³¹ and he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. (Matt 24:29-31, emphasis added)

What comes next? The marriage of the Lamb and His Bride:

*“Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.
7 Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory,
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his Bride has made herself ready;
8 it was granted her to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure” —
for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints.* (Rev 19: 6-8)



We have been making a connection between the Passover *seder*, the *Eyrusin* and the Mass and the Divine Liturgy in this essay on the Last Supper. Is there a connection between eschatology (end time) and the Liturgy? Absolutely, it is very evident in the Divine Liturgy of the East and the traditional Tridentine Mass of the West, although unfortunately less so in the current *Novus Ordo* Mass. What eschatological similarities did the Divine Liturgy and Tridentine Mass share? In both liturgies the priest lead the worshipping congregation in facing East, that is, *ad Orientem*. This *ad Orientem* orientation of the Church’s worship is intimately connected to our Lord’s return and it goes back to the very earliest forms of liturgy.

“And when He was received again into Heaven He was borne towards the East, and thus His apostles worship Him, and thus He will come again in the way in which they beheld Him going towards Heaven; as the Lord Himself said, As the lightning cometh

out of the East and shineth even unto the West, so also shall the coming of the Son of Man be. So, then, in expectation of His coming we worship towards the East. But this tradition of the apostles is unwritten. For much that has been handed down to us by tradition is unwritten.” Saint John of Damascus (676-749)

Thus, built into the liturgy itself was the unwritten tradition of expectation for our Bridegroom’s return. Our expectancy for our Beloved’s return needs to be restored not only in our awareness, but also in our worship and therefore our liturgy so that we may be counted among the wise virgins are allowed into the wedding feast.