

The Wise Prince

The village spreads silently at the foothills of the forest-covered mountain, whose top is guarded by the lonely old castle.

The people from the village gaze with a respectful curiosity towards the castle with illuminated windows, through which smooth piano music can be heard sometimes. Every two or three days, they could see the new master of the castle strolling around on a beautiful white horse.

What clothes he has and what a face, what a gaze! Everyone only talks about him ...

One day, this mysterious prince has decided to see what kind of people lived in the village next to his castle. He could feel the prying eyes that accompanied him every time he went out for his evening walk after a day of work on the books he was writing. He thought it would not be a bad idea to take a look at the hearts of these people. The prince made an interesting plan and dressed up with the torn and dirty clothes he had from a former beggar that was now working as his servant. Helped by his servants, he soiled his hands, bare feet and face, so that he was unrecognizable and inspired pity for those who saw him.

Thoroughly disguised, the prince came out of the castle, went down to the village, and there started to beg from door to door, at all houses. Some people had mercy and gave him something to eat, something to wear, and sometimes even a penny. Other people, being richer, mocked him and even "caressed" him with a stick on his back, so that it was a pity to see him.

After a day of begging at all households, once the evening fell, carrying the full bag on his back, the prince withdrew unnoticed by anyone under the foot of the forest and from there up to the castle.

After the prince recovered from the fatigue caused by his secret "mission", he sent his servants to tell the villagers that he was waiting for them at a large banquet organized in his castle.

No sooner said than done. The village residents arrived festively dressed and organized in several groups, first the wealthiest and the better-regarded villagers, then the poorest ones. Directed by the servants, the villagers took their place at the table. At the signal of the prince who stood at the head of the large table, some trays were brought in from which each villager received a packet. At one point, the prince invited the villagers to serve the dinner, and after a short prayer, every guest opened his package, but when to put its content on the plate ... what a surprise!? The wealthy and arrogant villagers saw in their dishes leftovers of dry, moldy food they could not even dare to touch. Some of the poor villagers found in their packages a slice of fluffy bread, fruit, a fresh egg and even a chunk of tasty and well-prepared meat.

Everyone, rich and poor, looked puzzled at what was happening before their eyes, then with questioning looks, stared at the prince. When the murmurs of his guests began to rise, the prince stood up and, gently but firmly, began to speak with a clear voice, so everybody could understand:

- My dear guests, I am honored by your presence, I greet you, and I thank you for responding to the invitation I have made. You're probably asking what's going on in here and if it's a farce or a real thing you see, isn't it?

Well, to the joy of some and the sorrow of others, I want to tell you that everything you see is very important.

If you want to understand everything and to take advantage of what you see, please listen to me carefully.

I have recently moved in the area and, being neighbors, I thought it was good to know ourselves well from the beginning.

And how can we hope for good understanding and high feelings if we do not have in ourselves and in our midst our Lord Jesus Christ, the guarantee of peace and good order, the guarantee of all that is best for our lives?

Wishing to know you, I tested your love for God and, clothed like a beggar, I visited your homes, knocking from door to door, asking you to have mercy on me in the name of God.

And what did I get?

What each one of you have in the plate in front of you... Do you remember now? the prince asked, watching many glances lowered timidly toward the floor.

About the evil words, and about the blows received, I won't tell you anything, because I forgave them and forgot them already.

In closing this word, I want to tell you that at the judgment, when God will come to Earth, we will each stand before Him with our deeds and almsgiving, and then we will receive the reward for our good or bad deeds.

In the silence that followed the prince's words, each villager felt like a shiver, of fear and anxiety for some, and of peace and love full of warmth for others, passed through their being, and thoughts and images fought inside their mind... decisions were made.

At the command of the prince, the tables were filled with many delicious foods, and all, poor and rich, generous and greedy, rejoiced and thanked God for giving them such a wise master.

Starting with that day, every Sunday the villagers met with the faithful and wise prince at the Divine Liturgy in the new church from the village.

As they looked at the prince's face, they immediately remembered the lesson received, and, looking towards the icon of the Savior Jesus Christ, wondered if their almsgiving and deeds were or were not pleasing to the Righteous Judge, and what payment they would receive for all of them...

The rich who became merciful and the poor, strengthened in their faith by the lesson they've received, have lived many happy years together with their prince in peace and good Christian understanding.