

and they come and say unto Him, Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but Thy disciples fast not? And Jesus said unto them, Can the sons of the bridal chamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days. Even the disciples of John were imperfect in their understanding of Christ and they continued to keep the Judaic customs. Therefore certain individuals approached Christ and held up John's disciples as an example, accusing Christ's disciples of not fasting as did John's. He answered by saying, "Now I am the Bridegroom, and My disciples ought to be cheerful and ought not to fast. But when I am taken from this life, then temptations will beset them and they will fast and struggle." He calls Himself the Bridegroom not only because He weds virgin souls, but also because the time of His first coming is not a time of grief or gloom for those who believe in Him, nor is it a time of much toil. For without any labors on our part to fulfill the law, He gives us rest in baptism. What toil is it to be baptized? None at all, yet it is through this easily accomplished act that we find salvation. "The sons of the bridal chamber" are the apostles, for they also have been deemed worthy to share the Bridegroom's joy. They share with Him every heavenly good thing and every spiritual pleasure. But also understand it in this manner: every man, when he labors unto virtue, is a son of the bridal chamber. While he has Christ the Bridegroom with him, he does not fast, that is, he does not do the works of repentance. For how could one who is not sinning do so? But when Christ the Bridegroom has been taken from him, that is, when he has fallen into sin, then he fasts and repents so that he might be healed of his sin.

21-22. No man seweth a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment: else the new piece that filled it up pulleth away from the old, and the rent is made worse. And no man putteth new wine into old wineskins: else the new wine doth burst the wineskins, and the wine is spilled, and the wineskins will be destroyed: but new wine must be put into new wineskins. He says that a piece of new cloth, when patched on to an old garment, will tear it because it has not shrunk and it is too stiff, and that new wine will burst old wineskins as it warms. Likewise burdening My disciples with more than their strength allows would harm them. They are like the old garments because of the weak-

ness of their understanding. It is not necessary to lay on them the strong commandment of fasting. You may also understand it thus: as the disciples of Christ belong to the New, they are not able to observe the practices and laws of the Old.

23-28. And it came to pass, that He went through the wheat fields on the sabbath day; and His disciples began, as they made their way, to pluck the heads of wheat. And the Pharisees said unto Him, Behold, why do they on the sabbath day that which is not lawful? And He said unto them, Have ye never read what David did, when he had need, and hungered, he, and they that were with him? How he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and did eat the loaves of oblation, which is not lawful to eat but for the priests, and gave also to them which were with him? And He said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath. Therefore the Son of Man is Lord also of the sabbath. The disciples of the Lord were plucking the heads of wheat as if they were no longer accustomed to living according to the law. The Pharisees became indignant, and then were refuted by Christ Who brought up the example of David who, by necessity, set aside the law in the days of Abiathar the high priest. For as the prophet David was fleeing from Saul, he came to this high priest and tricked him into thinking that he had been sent by the king on some urgent military mission. Whereupon David not only ate the loaves of oblation, but also took the sword of Goliath which had been dedicated to the Lord. There were twelve loaves set out each day on the table in the sanctuary, six on the right side and six on the left. Some have asked how it is that the evangelist here calls the high priest Abiathar, while in the book of Kings he is called Ahimelech.⁶ It can be said that perhaps Abiathar had two names and that he was also called Ahimelech. Also it can be said that the book of Kings says that the priest at that time was Ahimelech, while the evangelist says that the high priest was Abiathar. So this is not contradictory, for the priest was Ahimelech, while the high priest was Abiathar. Understand this also in a spiritual sense: when the disciples of Christ, "on the sabbath," that is, when their souls were at rest from the passions (for 'sabbath' means 'rest'), and the demons did

⁶ 1 Kings (I Samuel) 21:1-9