

Our Feasts (Fotis Kondoglou)

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For many people, Christmas, New Year, Epiphany and other feasts aren't feasts at all, nor days full of joy, but times that bring sorrow and hardship. Hard times for the souls of those who aren't in a position to celebrate in the way that others are. Apart from those who are embittered by life's ills, the bereaved and the sick, most of these people have been forced by necessity into becoming beggars and needy. Many of them perhaps don't care much about their own happiness, but have become beggars through wanting to bring joy to their children or others dependent upon them. Such people weep in secret over their woes and they're the greatest martyrs, swallowing their chagrin day and night as if it were a bitter potion.



And then there's the fact that, on these holy days, when we should be clasping each other ever closer, we're in fact becoming more estranged from each other, divided into two camps totally foreign to each other and almost hostile. On the one hand you've got those who are happy, well-off and lucky, while, on the other, there are the unhappy and the discarded. Between them, at feasts, 'a great chasm has been set in place'. There's no bridge to unite the two sides of this river, even though on other days they come into closer contact. The rich and those who are able to do so, do everything to show off their wealth and their worldly goods in the face of the famished. And all this in the name of Christ, Who was born in utter poverty, in the frost! The birth of Christ isn't celebrated by people who are as poor as He was, but by the rich, who use His poverty as a way to display their wealth.

But can you really feel happy in the midst of the unfortunate?

Only if you're heartless. Those who wish to make a display of their wretched 'happiness' to the starving and the deprived, are truly monsters. And yet, there are many such people among us these days, though they weren't so numerous in years gone by. This is another boon brought to us by our great civilization from its great centres.



Our feasts were always religious and this is why they had a somewhat different character... They were modest and spiritual and didn't scandalize the poor, insofar as this is possible for us, sinful people that we are. The rich and those who were comfortably off avoided wounding the poor and felt the need to warm their hearts by secretly sending gifts to their homes, tactfully, so as not to humiliate them. And so the difference was made to seem as small as possible.

This is how our wonderful and unaffected customs came about, with carols that children still sing in the streets and at houses, with bells, with beautiful sentiments, fitting practices and pleasant company which bonded people together rather than setting them apart. But materialism and the beast that is callousness have gradually tainted these good feasts of ours, which our forebears compared most aptly to staging-posts on the monotonous path of life: 'Life without feasts is a long road without inns'.

Some modernizers pretend to be characters of weight and positivity, personages who aren't moved by emotions and who will tell you that all this is anachronistic and of no import. For me, these people are spiritually shrivelled, they're frozen wastes, lacking love, lacking joy and also lacking pain. Because joy and pain are linked. People like that are always like the dead mountains on the moon. And yet some of these 'rationalists' and 'positivists' go crazy over foreign fiestas and modern celebrations which reduce people to a mockery. Just so long as there's some cosmopolitan model to be found in the 'great centres abroad'.

Kontoglou was a person of many talents: painter, iconographer and man of letters. He was also a devout Orthodox Christian and a critic of ecumenism. He died in 1965, which makes this a particularly prescient article. Since then, we've seen concerted efforts aimed precisely at the globalism, multiculturalism, syncretism and ecumenism which he identifies in this article as being foreign to Orthodoxy. That being said, of course, the absence of love and concern for our fellow human beings is exclusively our own fault. [WJL].