

## **Homily on the 18<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost/ 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Luke**

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**Sunday 30/09/2018**

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, one God. Amen.

Today we listened to the Gospel reading for the second Sunday of Luke. Although today's reading was a very short one, it more than makes up for this in content and substance.

In the first line of today's reading, Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ tells his disciples: "And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise."

Note how Christ says this exhortation in the positive. He does not say: "And just as you want men NOT to do to you, you also do NOT do to them likewise." Here it is a call to action on our parts.

These words are known as the "Golden Rule". And this was not a new thing. It had been around in some form or other for centuries, even before the time of Jesus Christ. And to this day, many other religious traditions still use it.

But Jesus in his message to his disciples takes it a step further. In Luke 6:27, He instructs us "Love your enemies!"

What would the disciples have made of this? They must have been completely astounded. They knew the command: "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" which was part of God's Law given by Moses to ancient Israel, and which meant that you reciprocated the actions of your enemies, by getting the upper hand or defeating them.

Christ here moves onto a whole new level, unknown to his followers. He was asking them to forget about this part of the Mosaic Law and what it stood for, and to interpret it in a completely different way. He was asking them to love their enemies.

Loving our enemies must be one of the most difficult things for man to do. It goes against our basic human instincts. It is almost a natural thing for humans to hate their enemies. It forms part of our human biological instinct for survival, the "fight or flight" reflex.

But why is loving our enemy so difficult? One primary reason is that it is not logical and highly impractical. To love our enemy is to allow him to take advantage of us. To love our enemy is to let him step all over us. This does not make any sense. We want justice, and loving our enemy seems so unjust.

But Jesus Christ our God does not stop there. Oh no. He also tells us to do good things for our enemies, and not to look for any form of reward when we do this.

In Matthew 5:38-48, He instructs us to lend without expecting any interest, or even the return of what is given. If someone slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other cheek to him also. If someone takes your tunic, give them your cloak as well. Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.

How can we comply with this instruction of Jesus?

We must never forget that the things that we think are impossible for us to do, can be made possible because of our relationship with God. We all know that Jesus died on the cross in excruciating pain and torment, fully as a human being, suffering the pains any person would have suffered if crucified. All this pain was inflicted on Him by other human beings.

But, instead of hating and cursing them, which would have been a natural thing to do, He prayed for them, saying: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do". (Luke 24:34).

Because of this, we must strive to purify our hearts and minds, and by doing so put our intentions into actions. To show our faith we must love our enemies, and we must also be charitable. If we really are followers of Christ, we must [?] no enemies, and our charity must be boundless.

We should not expect nor desire any thanks for any charitable act we perform. If we can, we should even do our charitable deeds in secret: "But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing". (Matt. 6:3). The reward will come, but it will come from God.

We need to be as loving as God is loving, as forgiving as God is forgiving, as merciful as God is merciful, and we must also be blind to race, class, and any other distinction that might cause us to reject or repulse other people.

We are called to rise above what is "typical" human behaviour. We are not called to be just good human beings. We are called to be perfect human beings. "The glory of God is a human being fully realized." To be a perfect human being is to be like God. And this is the whole aim of our lives: to become like God. Anything in our thoughts and behaviour that doesn't reflect the love of God is to be rejected and discarded, and we should repent for it.

If we give up our own will and embrace His own will as our own, we will become able to love our enemies and be merciful, even as our Father in Heaven is merciful.

But what if we are unable or refuse to show mercy and love towards people who are difficult, annoying, inconvenient, or even despicable? People we would not expect anything from? Then, we turn away from our calling to be God's holy temple as surely as if we bowed down before an idol like pagans do.

Because, when we turn away from God's calling, we simply serve ourselves and disregard the calling that He has given us all: to be so transformed by the mercy of our Father in heaven that we demonstrate that same mercy to others. For He is kind to the ungrateful, to the selfish, to those who reject Him by the way they live, even those who killed His Son. He will still bestow countless blessings on us all. And through the Son whom He sent out of love for the world, He has made us His own children.

Prayer, fasting, confession and communion are very important in our lives as Orthodox Christians. But, if we do not also embrace the "Golden Rule", then our lives will be empty, meaningless and self-serving. This is not what God had in mind for us. It is not enough to listen to the Word of God, we need to live our lives according to the Word of God, and this on a daily basis.

Amen.