

## **Homily for the Sunday of Forgiveness**

**Fr Dc Filip Lommaert**

**18 February 2018**

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. One God.

Today, we are on the eve of Great Lent. This is a very special period for all of us indeed.

During the last couple of weeks we have completed the time of preparation for this great period; beginning with the Sunday of Zacchaeus, continuing with the Sundays of the Publican and the Pharisee, the Prodigal Son, the Sunday of the Last Judgment, and now finally - the Sunday which commemorates the expulsion of Adam from Paradise.

Of course much can be, and has indeed been said about each of these preparatory Sundays—from the desire of Zacchaeus to the humble prayer of the publican, to the repentance of the prodigal son, and finally to the clear teaching of the Lord as to what we need to do to inherit the Kingdom of Heaven.

Nevertheless, the Holy Church, in Her mercy and love for us gives us comfort, even in the simple fact that this Sunday, although frightfully serious in its theme of Adam's fall and in turn, our own sinfulness, has another, more consoling theme as well, and that is the theme of forgiveness.

The Sunday of Forgiveness, the last of the preparatory Sundays before Great Lent, has two themes: it commemorates Adam's expulsion from Paradise, and it accentuates our need for forgiveness.

There are obvious reasons why these two things should be brought to our attention as we stand on the eve of Great Lent.

Great Lent is a time when we weep with Adam and Eve before the closed gate of Eden, repenting with them for the sins that have deprived us of our free communion with God.

But Lent is also a time when we are preparing to celebrate the saving event of Christ's death and rising, which has reopened Paradise to us once more (Luke 23:43).

So sorrow for our exile in sin is tempered by the hope of our re-entry into Paradise.

St. John Chrysostom points out, that the debt we owe to the Saviour is much greater than the one we owe to our fellow servant. He points out that there is more to this forgiveness, though, and this is an important key to our Life in Christ.

The Lord could have forgiven us without our forgiving others. However we benefit from forgiving others by growing in love and gentleness toward our fellow man.

Then again, last week we learned that our love and gentleness toward our fellow man results in showing love to the Lord.

When we love we come closer to God. By loving we come closer to the realisation of the likeness of God and become partakers of the Divine Energies of God.

This is our ultimate goal, to become a perfect mirror of God's love. This is what we call "theosis".

This is what the saints were and are; radiant examples of those who showed us Christ in their words, their actions and their very being.

This is our legacy. By forgiving others as God forgives us, we grow closer to God's likeness; we become children of God and co-heirs with Christ.

St. John Chrysostom writes: "...not by grace only, you see, ought we to become His children, but also by our works. And nothing makes us so like God, as being ready to forgive the wicked and wrong-doers; even as indeed He had taught before, when He spoke of His 'making the sun to shine on the evil and the good.'

The theme of forgiveness is emphasized in the Gospel reading for this Sunday (Matthew 6:14-21).

Before we enter the Lenten fast, we are reminded that there can be no true fast, no genuine repentance, no reconciliation with God, unless we are at the same time reconciled with one another.

A fast without mutual love is the fast of demons. We do not travel the road of Lent as isolated individuals but as members of a family.

Our asceticism and fasting should not separate us from others, but should link us to them with ever stronger bonds.

The first step we need to take is to become "a man or woman for others", and to do this we need to forgive the "other".

In today's Epistle reading, the Holy Apostle Paul instructs, "Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand (Rom.14: 4).

Later, in the same Epistle to the Romans, he says, "Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to put a stumbling block or a cause to fall in our brother's way." (14:13)

And also, "We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves"(15:1).

And again, "Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God"(15:7).

This is what Great Lent is all about, and actually, it is what our entire life as Christians is and should be about - being reconciled to one another, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. By so doing, we become united to Christ Himself.

Obviously, as fallen people, living in a fallen world, we sin against one another, however, we must realise that we must immediately forgive our brother or sister when they sin against us, and we must also immediately ask forgiveness of them when we sin against them.

Our Father among the Saints, Saint John of Kronstadt is quoted as saying, "Imagine, picture the multitude of your sins and imagine how tolerant of them is the Master of your life, while you are unwilling to forgive your neighbour even the smallest offense. Moan and bewail your foolishness, and that obstruction within you will vanish like smoke, you will think more clearly, your heart will grow calm, and through this you will learn goodness, as if not you yourself had heard the reproaches and indignities, but some other person entirely, or a shadow of yourself." (Lessons on a Life of Grace)

If we follow these instructions of Saint John Kronstadt, they will bring us joy, the joy that comes from above. The joy that comes from knowing that our sins will be forgiven, if we forgive the sins of our neighbour, as is promised in today's Gospel reading.

It will be this very joy that gives us the strength to continue our efforts throughout the time of Great Lent. We know that many and great temptations come with the season of Great Lent.

We must joyfully persevere in the face of these temptations, knowing that if we pray sincerely, and give those prayers back to God, they will pass, and with His help, we will become victorious.

AMEN.