

# Sermon Forgiveness Sunday

[Rom. 13:11-14:4 (§112)] ; [Matt. 6:14-21 (§17)]

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit:  
CHRIST IS IN OUR MIDST !!!

It is time: The time is now. It is time for the Lord to act.

WAKE UP!! The night is far spent. St. Paul tells us to put aside all excesses both of our bodies and of our passions. But rather to put on our Lord Jesus Christ. Some of our passions are of the body: rebelling – drunkenness, sexual excess; . . . some passions are of our mind: arguing, strife, jealousy, judgement. We are beginning the strictest time of fasting in our Church Year. We each will fast: fasting not just from food but also from these passions. Or we will distain the fast, and will lose the opportunity to war against those things that come between us and God. The Church gives us this opportunity to journey with Christ to Jerusalem.

Today is Forgiveness Sunday. At Vespers after Trapeza, we will have the service of mutual forgiveness. The Gospel we are reminds us of the importance of forgiveness – that we must forgive in order to be forgiven. We are also instructed to keep our fasting a secret. Those of us who are new to fasting, it is good to have one person that we hold ourselves accountable to. Those of us who are old hat at fasting should tell no one how well or how badly we do it. Our fasting is supposed to reflect the simplicity of

Paradise; the peace of Paradise.

Keep our eyes on our own plates. It is none of our business how others are keeping the fast. For those of us who are traveling, or visiting, or in situations where someone else is putting food in front of us: eat what is placed in front of you. If someone puts a plate of steak in front of you, it is THE FAST to eat it, to accept their hospitality without hinting that you are observing a fast.

As we increase our fasting, prayers, and alms – expect resistance: resistance from our society, from our friends and family, . . . resistance from the evil one and from the demons; . . . but most of all let us expect resistance in ourselves, If you fall in your observance of the Fast, do not use that as an excuse to invalidate yourselves, the Church's appointed fast, or others. Get back up and begin again.

Let us fast as a way of drawing close to God, to let our **hunger** remind us of God. Let us not fast for its own sake, for remember that the Pharisee fasted, and his fasting was worthless, for he was proud of his fasting.

I invite you to fast from the glut of information that we feast on daily, especially what we have experienced for the last 10 days. I realize many of us need to be on-line for work. Still it is good to turn down the volume on all the news and stories and issues and noise that assails us daily. Even if we must be on-line, if we can spend as little time the first week of lent and during Holy Week we will do well.

There are lots of people out there who have a vested interest in us being angry, upset. They want to manipulate our passions for

their cause whether it be political, for profit, for power. I invite you to fast from political arguments. The noise that is getting louder keeps us from seeing our own contribution to that very noise, so that we can't see ourselves and repent.

And what of repentance? *Metánoia* (the Greek word that is translated) means to change our nous, our spiritual mind. It is also used to describe a profound bow to the ground. It is the posture of humility. If we force our bodies to be humble, our spirits and minds will follow.

I invite you to listen to the Quiet. In the Quiet it is easier to see the meaninglessness of it all – the boredom and the fear. And I invite you to treasure the Kingdom of God above all. As Elijah met God's glory in the quiet still voice, so let us meet God through stillness.

Forgiveness – entering the fast with forgiveness. Forgiveness does not mean that what was done was OK – just that you are not going to let it rent space in your head.

Most people, when they say to others "forgive", they mean stop processing the pain, because your pain makes them uncomfortable. The only way of healing is through the pain – and it is only through the pain that true forgiveness can happen.

Forgiveness is a process. . . it lives after the processing of grieving and of facing abandonment.

True forgiveness is a process that takes us deep into ourselves and our own pain. It is not the same as excusing the abuser. It cannot be forced; it cannot be accomplished by saying mere

words. It cannot be rushed, for if it is rushed it is false.

Forgiveness is a journey. . . . a journey into a wound that someone has made in us. . . . only to discover that the wound is deeper than this person who wounded us, and that there are a lot of other people in this wound, and one of those includes myself.

Until we forgive the darkness in ourselves, we do not know what forgiveness is.

We begin this time of fasting in a time of conflict and war. We feel helpless, as if there is little we can do in a drama that is being directed by three powers who have not consulted us. What can we do?

As St. Silouan said: We can stand before the Lord in prayer, praying for the world that is shedding blood.

Metropolitan Anthony Bloom adds that we pray, “Not in that easy prayer that we offer out of our comfort, but in a prayer that rushes to heaven from sleepless nights; in a prayer that does not give rest; in a prayer that is born from the horror of compassion; in a prayer that no longer allows us to continue living our insignificant and empty life. That prayer requires us to finally understand that life is deep and that we are spending it racing about something unworthy and also became unworthy of ourselves, unworthy of God, unworthy of sorrow and joy, the torment on the Cross and the Glory of Resurrection, which constantly alternate and intertwine on our earth.”

“In the face of what is going on in front of the Cross, death, and

spiritual agony of people, let us renounce the pettiness and insignificance of our life—and then we will be able to do something: by our prayer, by way of our life, and perhaps even by something braver and more creative.”

It is a very difficult time, . . . and there will be much to distract us from focusing on prayer and our own repentance. We have to be more vigilant to our own spiritual needs. . . And the parts of us that deal with fear, want us to focus on that instead. . . This is going to be one of the most difficult Great Lents that any of us do. Be sober: watch and pray that we enter not into temptation.

To Him Who comes to His Passion for our sakes, be all glory honour and worship; now and ever and unto the ages of ages.