



My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

The key phrase from this week's Gospel is so well known that many approach it as a clear piece of positive advice we can find in many other philosophies: "*As you wish that men would do to you, do so to them*" (Luke 6:31). We should remember though, that our Lord came to a world focused on revenge as justice. In both ancient pagan and Jewish law, an evildoer's punishment was expected to match his crime, as in "*...you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe*" (Exodus 2:23-25). Christ knew that He was challenging His hearers when He said the exact opposite, "*Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you; bless those who curse you; pray for those who mistreat you. If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to everyone who asks of you, and if anyone takes away what is yours, do not ask for it back again*" (Luke 6:27-30).

Many have struggled with this kind of self-denial. This, however, is why His point is so strong: it is not in our sinful nature to love everyone equally—but it *is* in God's nature, for, as we read in the First Epistle of John, "*...God is love*" (1 John 4:8). Christ understands that human relationships are about giving and taking, so that we can live in peace and enjoy life. However, Christ is not asking us to behave like other people. As He wisely observes, "*...even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again*" (Luke 6:32-34). We, who have become His disciples, are asked to do more than the rest of the world.

Instead, we are to, "*Be merciful, even as your Father in Heaven is merciful*" (Luke 6:36). The reward for the very real struggle is often mistakenly thought to be gaining entrance to Heaven. The struggle is part of the transformation on our journey to becoming both one with God in Heaven, & also like God.

My brothers and sisters, in our sinful world, it is only natural that the human mind cries out for order. However, as Orthodox Christians, we must remember that our focus is always to imitate and remain close to our Creator, who, in His infinite wisdom and tenderness "*...is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish*" (Luke 6:36). My hope and prayer is that we all continue to meditate on these things. However impossible and contrary they may seem, let never forget that "*...with God all things are possible*" (Matthew 19:26).

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