

MATTHEW 18: 23-35

23. Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants.

24. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents.

25. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made.

26. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

27. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.

28. But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellowservants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest.

29. And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.

30. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.

31. So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done.

32. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me:

33. Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?

34. And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him.

35. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.

What a sobering message is given to us by the Savior. Each one of us needs to look very honestly into our hearts and see if this parable is in fact speaking to us personally. Am I acting in the same hypocritical way as this servant? Do I honestly forgive everyone who I think may have offended me, cheated me, or has hurt me in any way? Or, do I carry grudges, seek vengeance, and justify to myself my dislike or hatred of someone? As this parable warns us, our salvation will be determined by whether or not we have true love and compassion.

The message goes to the very heart of a true Christian way of life. It is repeated and expanded upon in Scripture multiple times. Every time that we read or hear the Lord's prayer, we are

warned that God will only forgive our sins if we forgive those who have sinned against us. In the sermon on the Mount, the Lord's first major sermon to His newly chosen apostles, He describes in detail how we need to treat people if we want to be true Christians. We are told to turn our other cheek to someone who has struck us on one cheek. We are instructed not to resist evil, meaning that we need to respond to evil with forgiveness and kindness. We are to love our enemies, to bless and pray for them. We are expected to sacrifice ourselves out of love for our neighbor.

But if we examine our lives, we probably will have to admit that our behavior falls far short of our Savior's expectations. Our values are the values of this world, very different from the values of the Savior. We teach our children that they have the right to fight if someone hits them first. We respond to anger with our own anger. We exact revenge upon someone who has hurt us, and the level of our vengeance can far exceed the damage done to us. We carry grudges for inordinate amounts of time, justifying ourselves that that person deserves our enmity. And we still call ourselves Orthodox Christian.

Through this parable, Jesus Christ reveals to us how He will judge us. He asks us to strive to emulate Him and live according to the teachings of His Church. He taught us how to do this by His personal example. He hung on the cross and asked God to forgive the people who did this dastardly thing to Him. He was constantly abused, mocked, and ridiculed and never responded in kind. He was willing to forgive any sinner any sin. His whole earthly life was a life of sacrificial service to all people. To encourage us to do this, He even gives us an incredible offer. He will forgive us all of our sins if we honestly try. But, He will only be as compassionate and forgiving to us as we are to our neighbor.

My dear brothers and sister in Christ, what a truly loving God is our God. Let us take full advantage of His offer and reinforce our lives and hearts with true love, forgiveness, and compassion. Then, we will be able to share with Him a blessed eternity in the Kingdom that He prepare for those who love Him. May God through His divine Grace strengthen our will to enable us to accomplish this.

With Love in Christ,

Archpriest Serge Kotar