

Forgiveness Sunday Matthew 6:14-21

For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly. Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. (KJV)

Forgiveness Sunday is the opportunity in God's Holy Church to resolutely begin the Fast and the journey to Pascha. Believers are to be forgiving in their relationships in the same way that God forgives.

The Gospel is clear. If believers are not forgiving of others, personal forgiveness cannot be expected from God. Believers can be free of burdensome impediments in relationships by sincerely forgiving and by seeking forgiveness.

Burdensome impediments arise in relationships that cause them to be unhealthy and not fully loving. Relationships in families, at school, at work and in the parish need restored to good health with love from time to time.

The Church encourages believers to restore healthy relationships through forgiveness. Seeking forgiveness from each other and being forgiving of each other opens relationships to restored unity with Jesus Christ.

The Holy Scriptures help us to understand personal relationships and put them in perspective. St. John's Epistle states: "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God." (1 John 4:7)

Husbands and wives benefit from consistently forgiving each other. Parents and children strengthen and renew their relationships through forgiveness. The Gospel is clear about the value of practicing forgiveness with each other.

Parishes are stronger and thrive when forgiveness is regularly practiced among parishioners. Casting away bad memories that burden relationships allows for new beginnings in Jesus Christ.

Believers seeking and granting forgiveness from each other remove barriers to unity in Jesus Christ. St. John's Epistle states: "For this is the message ye have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another." (1 John 3:11)

The Lord Jesus Christ showed how to love by His humility, by the washing of His disciples' feet and by His death on the Cross. Great Lent intends believers to love as Jesus would have us love.

We love by forgiving each other and by seeking forgiveness from each other. St. John Climacus whom we commemorate on the Fourth Sunday of Great Lent expressed in writing how to love in the book The Ladder of Divine Ascent.

St. John Climacus said: “Do not wish to assure everyone in words of your love for them, but rather ask God to show them your love without words.” * Actions in personal relationships reveal the contents of the heart, mind and soul.

Today the Church is at the entrance of the Great Fast. Believers are challenged to honestly examine their relationship with the Lord God. The Fast is a time to seriously examine our relationship with Jesus Christ.

Searching the heart, mind and soul daily throughout Great Lent is beneficial. Repentance of sins is possible when a new beginning in Jesus Christ is desired. Holy Confession and Communion afford new beginnings in Christ.

Believers are expected to honestly assess whether the Baptismal commitment to Jesus Christ as King and as God is fully honored. Restoring purity to the soul comes through repentance.

The Gospel directs believers to seek treasures in heaven where moth and rust do not consume and thieves do not break in and steal. Great Lent is the time to seriously determine our true treasures.

Do we treasure material things over our relationship with Jesus Christ? Do we pursue goals and engage in activities that have nothing to do with Jesus Christ? Do we act like the Pharisees outwardly but have hearts harboring ill of others?

Great Lent nourishes believers seeking salvation of their souls. Great Lent encourages believers to restore their healthy relationship with Jesus Christ. Great Lent is the time to cleanse the Baptismal garment of accumulated sins.

The Lord Jesus Christ said: “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Mt.4:17) Pascha seems far off in the distance. Great Lent will proceed rapidly. Each day is to be used wisely.

We do not know when our next breath may be our last. We do not know the time or the hour when Jesus Christ will return for the Great and Final Judgment. Like the wise virgins, let us be prepared. (Mt. 25:1-13)

Thank God for the arrival of Great Lent. Thank God for Forgiveness Sunday and the opportunity to begin anew with each other and with God. May our hearts, minds and souls rejoice in Jesus Christ today.

Thank God for the merciful love afforded for each person. Thank God for the opportunity to repent. Thank the Lord Jesus Christ for having journeyed to the Cross and for rising from the Tomb for our salvation.

Forgiveness Sunday. Venerable Gerasimus of the Jordan. March 4/17, 2024.
Hidden Valley, Pennsylvania. Father Rodney Torbic

*St. John Climacus. The Ladder of Divine Ascent. Holy Transfiguration Monastery, Boston, Massachusetts, 2012)