

**SERMON - "LOVE YOUR ENEMIES" - Luke 6:31-36, Sunday, October 4, 2020
(Based on a sermon by Metropolitan Hilarion Alfeev)**

In the Holy Gospel today, our Lord again reminds us that we must love our enemies. Other religions and moralities teach that we should answer good with good, love our neighbors and be merciful to those who are merciful to us. Christianity, however, requires much more from us. The Christian must love not only those who love us, not only our neighbor, not only our family and our friends and not only those who do good to us, but as Christians we must also love our enemies and those who hate us as well. It is this high moral calling from our Lord that Christians must love their enemies that distinguishes Christians from most other people in the world today who do not believe in doing good to those who cause them evil or harm. It is more popular in today's world to follow the Old Testament commandment "an eye for an eye" and a "tooth for a tooth" (Exodus 21:24). The majority of people today believe that if someone does evil or harm to you, then you should punish that person and take revenge. Our Lord Jesus Christ, however, does not teach this. "If someone strikes you on the cheek, then turn to him the other cheek" (Luke 6:29). If someone does evil to you, do not answer by doing evil in return. Instead, respond by doing good to the one who does evil to you. If someone causes you grief or offends you, do not respond by grieving and offending that person in return. Instead, respond by showing mercy, forgiveness and love. Our Lord did not only give us this commandment but He demonstrated it in His own life and actions. When our Savior was spat upon, beaten and mocked by the Roman soldiers, and when His hands and feet were nailed to the wood of the Cross; when He suffered intolerable physical and spiritual pain, He responded by saying about those who were responsible for His crucifixion, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). When we look at our Savior crucified and hanging on the Cross, we should remember that our Lord commanded us to love our enemies. We should also know and understand, that even though this commandment may be difficult to fulfill, nonetheless it is within our power to do so. It may not be easy, but with God's help we are all able to do it. The Lord would not command us to do anything that was not within our power and capability.

In the history of Christianity there have been many people who have fulfilled this commandment. One example is the Holy New-Martyr Grand Duchess Elizabeth Feodorovna. St. Elizabeth was a princess of the German Royal family of Hesse-Darmstadt. She was an older sister of Alexandra, the last Empress of Russia, a granddaughter of Queen Victoria of England, and a great-aunt of Philip, the contemporary Duke of Edinburgh and consort of Queen Elizabeth II of England. The New-Martyr St. Elizabeth was the wife of Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich, Governor of Moscow and brother of Nicholas II, the last Tsar of Russia. St. Elizabeth was raised in the Lutheran faith and received the best English education available at that time. She was still a Lutheran at the time of her marriage to Grand Duke Sergei. She was a deeply religious person and with all her heart she embraced the Orthodox faith. When she became Orthodox, she probably did not realize that the Orthodox faith would lead her to an unbearable cross which she would receive willingly and with love.

At the time of the first Russian Revolution her husband was murdered by the bomb of a terrorist. With her own hands she collected the pieces of his body which had been torn

to bits by the bomb. She endured this extremely deep and personal tragedy, but in her heart and soul she did not harbor any hate or enmity towards the man who murdered her husband. In fact, she visited her husband's murderer in prison and gave him a Holy Gospel as a gift. She told him that she forgave him and would pray for his soul. She even begged the Tsar not to execute her husband's murderer for what he had done. After the death of her husband, she did not return to her homeland but she remained in Russia. She sold all of her jewelry and property and with her wealth she founded and built a convent named in honor of Martha and Mary. St. Elizabeth was tonsured as a nun and became the first abbess of her newly built convent. Attached to the convent was a hospital and St. Elizabeth and the sisters combined the monastic life with doing social and charitable work and taking care of the sick and the needy. After the October Revolution, she and the remaining members of the Royal Russian family of the House of Romanov were taken to the Urals and suffered a horrible martyrdom at the hands of the Godless satanic Communists. This is just one of the many examples which exist in our recent Church history. In 2018 we celebrated the 100th anniversary of the martyrdom of St. Elizabeth, Emperor Nicholas II, Empress Alexandra, and all the Royal Russian New-Martyrs. Today St. Elizabeth and all the Royal Russian New-Martyrs intercede for us before the throne of God, as do all the New-Martyrs and Confessors of Russia who suffered at the hands of the Communists. We should never forget the examples of their lives. We should remember, that there exists a degree of love that makes it possible for a person to forget about himself and sacrifice his life for the sake of others. There is a degree of love which makes it possible for a person to love not only his friends and those who do good to him, but also his enemies and those who offend him. It is to this degree of love that our Lord calls every Orthodox Christian. Amen.