

## ON FORGIVENESS

**“Should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?”**

**Matthew 18:23-35**

**By Archbishop Peter Olsen**

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When I was a kid growing up, there was a famous comedy team called “Martin and Lewis.” It is not uncommon for singing groups or sometimes comedy teams to split up. Sometimes it just seems the natural thing to do; that it is just time to pursue new avenues of music or entertainment. It is not always expedient for everything to last forever. The tragedy, however, was that when Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis went their separate ways, they never spoke to each other again for many years. Twenty years later their mutual friend Frank Sinatra intervened and arranged for them to meet on live television during the famous Jerry Lewis Telethon for Muscular Dystrophy. I don't know whether or not they genuinely were reconciled at that time, nor whether or not they actually forgave each other whatever it was that caused the rift in their friendship. They both went on to become enormous and successful talents each in his own right. Jerry Lewis was an amazing comedian with many talents, and Dean Martin above all was a legendary singer, one of the greatest crooners of all time. It is ok that they pursued separate careers; it is not ok that they stopped speaking to each other. It is no secret that there was a famous fracture in a once warm relationship between Fr. Georges Florovsky and Fr. Alexander Schmemmann, two of the most erudite and influential theologians of our time. In fact, it was Fr. Florovsky who invited Fr. Schmemmann to leave France and to relocate with his family to America and to teach at St. Vladimir's Seminary. To my knowledge, sadly, there was never a reconciliation between them, yet we owe so much to both of them. The influence of both of them on church life will last for generations to come, and their writings and legacy will last forever.

Every day that goes by when two former friends or family members do not speak to each other is time lost that can never be regained. Sometimes years later folks are reconciled, and I rejoice when reconciliation takes place. Sadly, though, the years gone by in the meantime are lost forever, and however long it takes before they succumb to illness or the grave is the time that they have left. Is it really important whose fault it is, or who is right or wrong? Aren't we all sinners? Don't we *all* need forgiveness from our heavenly Father, and don't we all ask Him for forgiveness on a daily basis? If we are capable of asking God to forgive us, then why is it so difficult to ask forgiveness from someone that we deeply love, no matter who is at fault or who is to blame? How is it possible to constantly ask God for mercy when we don't show mercy to our brother or sister? If we are both not speaking to each other, and if we both harbor resentment, then no matter who is at fault, we are *both* at fault and both of us are to blame. Can we really say that we love God, but harbor resentment towards someone else? Are not all of us created in the image and likeness of God? Doesn't the resentment we feel towards others, therefore, transferred to God Himself as well? It is not a nice thing when someone hurts our feelings. Can any of us make the claim that we have never hurt someone else's feelings, either knowingly or unknowingly? Yes, it does not feel good when our feelings are hurt. But isn't the way we feel when there is a rift in our relationship just as bad or even worse? Doesn't pride and resentment and the loss of a loved one eat us up alive? How will we feel when that person passes on to the next life without our having spoken to each other and forgiven each other? If that happens, for the rest of our lives there will be a gaping wound in our lives that will never heal. It is even worse if we wish we had tried to reconcile with the other person, and now it is too late. My father recently celebrated his 100th birthday. It seems like only yesterday when my father was vibrant and physically very active. Senator James Buckley of NY recently passed away at 100 years old. I was amazed when I read that he was 100 years old. I couldn't believe it. It seems like only yesterday when he was active as a senator and active in the news and in political life. Where does the time go? It flies by, and it waits for no

one. We may not be able to control time, but we can control how we behave towards each other.

In today's parable from the Holy Gospel a lord forgives his servant the debt that is owed him. Yet, that same servant violently demands payment of a debt from a fellow servant. It is no wonder that the lord becomes angry. He says to the servant that he forgave, "You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you besought me, and should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you" (Matthew 18:32-33)? Let us remember this, brothers and sisters, when we say the Lord's Prayer, and daily ask God to forgive us our debts<sup>1</sup> (trespasses) as we forgive our debtors (those who trespass against us). If we do not forgive others, then we are not capable of saying the Lord's Prayer without being liars. God cannot forgive us if we cannot forgive others (see I John 4:20; Matthew 6:14). Amen.



**Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis speaking to each other on live television after not having spoken to each other for twenty years.**

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**1.** The Lord's Prayer can be found in Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4. In Luke's shorter version it says that we should forgive everyone who is indebted to us. In the more common longer version in Matthew's gospel the original Greek says *καὶ ἄφες ἡμῖν τὰ ὀφειλήματα ἡμῶν, ὡς καὶ ἡμεῖς ἀφήκαμεν τοῖς ὀφειλέταις ἡμῶν*. The original Greek *ὀφειλήματα* means *debts*. This is the correct translation. Thus, the correct translation of the Lord's prayer is to be found in the KJV which says: *And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.*