

SERMON - The Unforgiving Servant - Matt. 18:23-35, Sunday, August 12, 2018

In the lives of the holy monastic fathers, there is the story of a wealthy elderly man who wanted to become a monk. The abbot of the monastery hesitated to receive him, concerned that it would be too difficult for an old man to become a monk. The rich old timer answered, "Yes, but I want to become a monk. It is true that I cannot struggle like the other fathers because I am old now. I cannot fast very much, and it is hard for me to stand all night for vigils. Yes, it will be necessary for you to be condescending towards me." For one reason or another, the Abbot decided to accept the elderly man into the brotherhood. And so it was, the elderly monk would not fast very strictly. Many times he would not wake up for the vigils. The other monks would try to wake him, and he would sleep through the service. One day the fathers were all sitting in the courtyard of the monastery discussing how they would face the Lord with fear and trembling on Judgment Day. They discussed how they would try to make an apology and how they would answer the Lord when they would have to give an accounting of their lives before the throne of God. The elderly man sat serenely and quietly and didn't say anything. The other fathers eventually turned to the rich man who became a monk in his old age and asked him, "How will you answer the Lord on that day when you are standing naked before the throne of God?" The elderly monk answered, "I have nothing to worry about because I am going straight to Heaven." They answered him, "How can you say that? We have been struggling since our youth, and you come as an old man to the monastery, and you don't even fast or keep the vigils. We have kept everything strictly and yet we have fear. You have kept nothing and you have no fear. How can you possibly think that you are going straight to Heaven?" The old monk answered, "I have read two things in the Gospel, and I have kept both of those things all of my life. The first thing that I read was "Judge not and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you..." (Luke 6:37). I never judged a person my entire life, whether he was wrong or wronged someone else. Whatever I saw another man doing, I never judged him, because I remembered the words of our Savior. I have kept that commandment my entire life with exactness. The second commandment I read in the Scriptures is "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get" (Matthew 7:1-2). I was always just in my business transactions. I was always very compassionate and easygoing with people. I never got angry, I never swore at anyone and I never hit anyone. I never lost my patience with anyone, because I always remembered these words of our Savior. Therefore, the Lord will not judge me either, and the Lord will be patient with me. On that day even if the Lord would try to judge me, I will remind the Lord of His words spoken in the Gospel and that I have kept them exactly all of my life. That is why I expect to go straight into the Kingdom of Heaven and I have no fear. After hearing this from the old man, the other fathers did not know how to answer him. The elderly monk quoted the Holy Scriptures and spoke truly the word of God. The other monks went away in silence. A short time later the elderly monk fell asleep in the Lord. He had a good ending. He received the Holy Mysteries and he reposed in peace and tranquility. Some years later, as is the custom in the monasteries, his grave was opened, His remains gave off a sweet and heavenly fragrance. The fathers understood by this that the elderly monk had found favor with God and had achieved sanctity. They understood that the words spoken by the old monk while he was alive came true, that after his repose he went straight into the Kingdom of Heaven.

We are taught by the parable in the Gospel today to be merciful, kind and forgiving. In the Lord's prayer, the better translation into English is to "forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors." If we forgive what others owe us, then we will be forgiven by the Lord for what we owe Him. Whenever someone wrongs us, may we remember the words of our Savior and always be compassionate and merciful. May we always forgive from our hearts and as a result may we be deemed worthy to inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. Amen.