

SERMON on Forgiveness Sunday, March 1, 2020 - Matthew 6:14-21

All of us hope to receive forgiveness and mercy from our Lord at the awesome and dread Day of Judgement. Our Lord tells us that how you forgive others is how God will forgive you, and how you show mercy to others is how God will show mercy to you. At the end of the forty day Fast and at the end of Holy Week, who will not greet their brother and sister in Christ with a holy kiss and the exclamation that Christ is Risen? This Paschal greeting is worthless, however, if we do not *begin* the Fast by asking our brothers and sisters for forgiveness if we have offended them in any way. You might say, "Why do I have to ask *everyone*? Shouldn't I just have to ask those with whom I have had a disagreement or bad feelings? Why everyone? My answer to that is, have you said something, even briefly, to everyone at one time or another in the past year? How do you know that something you may have said or did possibly offended someone and you are unaware of it because they remained silent about it? Even much worse than this, however, are those who deliberately say and do hurtful things and have no idea that they are sinning and doing anything wrong. Some people even make a life out of it and still think that they are good Christians. How, you may ask, is that possible? Can anyone really be so deluded and spiritually blind? The answer, sadly, is yes. Remember the lesson of the Publican and the Pharisee. Didn't the Pharisee consider himself righteous and holy in the eyes of God, and wasn't he really very far from God in his deluded sinful pride, huge ego, self-righteousness and judgement of others? Maybe we are one of those blind sinners who offend people and are too blind to see it. Maybe we have such a big ego that we do not see how we have offended others. That is why we must ask forgiveness from *everyone*. It is a rule of thumb that before daring to approach the dread and awesome Holy Mysteries of Christ, it is absolutely necessary that we be at peace with *everyone*. The Holy Apostle says that we should not let the sun go down on our wrath, but that we must first reconcile with our brother or sister before we can offer our gift at the altar. If we don't, then receiving Holy Communion will not be for the forgiveness of our sins and for our salvation but instead unto our judgement and condemnation. If we try to reconcile with someone who has been offended, whether it was deliberate or just a misunderstanding of our words, regardless, we should humble ourselves and ask forgiveness. Whether or not we are at fault is of no consequence. It is still our duty to ask forgiveness and initiate reconciliation. Life is too short to hold grudges, and holding grudges hinders us from entering into the Kingdom of heaven. *All of us* at one time or another say something that offends someone else, even though we may have had no intention at all to offend anyone. It may be merely how we express ourselves. Everyone has different cultural and family and regional experiences, so what we say may not offend one person could very well be considered offensive to someone else, just because of his/her background or past experiences. That is also why we must ask forgiveness from *everyone*, because our society and even our country is so diverse, and many of us were raised and grew up differently than our brother or sister. Yet the Lord calls on all of us, if we are Christians, to have one mind and one heart. This is not impossible if we have the courage and humility to ask forgiveness from each other, not only today on Forgiveness Sunday, but all the time throughout the year as well. Does anyone here still think that is is any empty and meaningless ritual? Is anyone here still embarrassed for any reason to fulfill this practice which is required by the Holy Church? Someone might say, "I know that I have not offended *that* person because I never speak with that person because I don't like that person." All the *more* reason to ask forgiveness from that person that you don't like, because the Lord commands us that we must love our all of our neighbors. Furthermore, we are called upon to be perfect, as our Heavenly Father is perfect, says our Savior. Is anyone here still not willing to make an effort to ask everyone else in church here today for forgiveness? I hope not! And those who are not in church today, for whatever reason, ask them for forgiveness as well when you see them or speak with them again. On this great and holy day of Forgiveness Sunday, may I be the first one to ask forgiveness from all of you if I have offended any of you in any way. May all of enter the Holy Fast with peace and zeal and love and run our course successfully to the end, that we may be found

worthy, unworthy as we are, to greet the bright and joyous day of the Pascha of the Lord and live to kiss our brothers and sisters with the holy kiss, rejoicing and saying, "Christ is Risen!" "Indeed He is Risen!" Amen.