

SERMON - MATTHEW 18: 23-35, Story of the Unforgiving Servant, August 20, 2017

Psychiatrists say that many of our youth today are suffering from a lot of inner anguish and mental turmoil. Statistics show that many of our children are addicted to drugs, and the prevailing drug of use today is heroin. Why heroin, I don't know. All drug abuse is bad, but heroin is a particularly heinous and destructive drug, and many teens are losing their lives from being caught in the grip of this demon. Many famous people have lost their lives to heroin. In my generation some names that come to my mind are the rock singers Janis Joplin and Jim Morrison, the actors John Belushi and River Phoenix, and more recently the actor Philip Seymour Hoffman, all dead from heroin overdose. Rage is very prevalent among many of our youth today, and not only the youth but many adults are also consumed by anger. There is a strong sense of hopelessness, that the world is doomed, and suicide is very common. World news seems to be filled with one story after the other about hatred and violence. The most recent tragedies are Barcelona, Spain and Charlottesville, Virginia.

Why do I bring this up today? The story we just listened to from our Savior in the Holy Gospel concerns how people treat one another. We hear about forgiveness, and we also hear about the lack of forgiveness and rage. We heard the first example of how we should treat one another, how a man shows forbearance and kindness and forgives another man his debt. Then we heard an example of how we should not treat one another, how the man who was forgiven, instead of imitating the forgiveness he just received, acts with rage and violence against another person who owed him money, grabs him by the throat and demands immediate payment.

Not to get off the topic, but I believe in the power of music. I believe that music is a gift to us from God. I believe that music can heal. The human being and the human mind cannot be healthy without music. Our church services are filled with beautiful healing music that fills our souls with the Word of God. Music is very powerful.

I recently had the good fortune to attend a concert given by a living legend, the most famous blues performer today, Buddy Guy. Among his awards are seven grammys, and he's been inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. I noticed some things at this concert. I noticed that the majority of the the audience was white. Buddy Guy is black. All the famous legendary blues singers and performers were black: Robert Johnson, B.B. King, Muddy Waters, John Lee Hooker, Howling Wolf, Little Walter, Junior Wells, and so on and so on. All black. I thought about how this great music genre, the blues, is never played on the radio anymore. Buddy Guy's opening act was a young 18 year old named Quinn Sullivan who plays incredible blues. Buddy Guy first met Quinn when Quinn was eight years old and already could play with the best of them. Buddy has been taking Quinn with him on tour and is promoting him and helping him to become one of the leading blues players of the next generation. Quinn is white. One of Buddy's best friends who Buddy played with and who Buddy wrote a song about was the famous blues guitarist Stevie Ray Vaughn. Stevie Ray Vaughn tragically lost his life at a young age in a plane crash. Stevie Ray Vaughn was white. Buddy Guy is good friends and plays with Eric Clapton, John Beck, the Rolling Stones, and many other white performers. There is no black and white when they perform together. Just the blues, and a deep respect and love for each other and the music. It was literally an electrifying concert, and I can't even begin to describe how incredible it was to see Buddy Guy perform in person. At the end of the concert Buddy Guy performed a song co-written by Buddy with his record producer, Tom Hambridge. The name of the song is "Skin Deep." Buddy Guy said he was inspired to write the song "Skin Deep" after reuniting with a white childhood friend whose parents had cut off their relationship as teens. He has also stated that the inspiration came from his mother who used to tell him that 'beauty is only skin deep.' I want to share with you some of the lyrics to this song:

I've been around a while
I know wrong from right
And since a long time ago
Things been always black and white
Just like you can't judge a book by the cover
We all gotta be careful
How we treat one another
Skin Deep
Skin Deep
Underneath we're all the same
Skin Deep
Skin Deep
Underneath we're all the same
We're all of the same
A man in Louisiana
He never called me by my name
He said "boy do this and boy do that"
But I never once complained
I knew he had a good heart
But he just didn't understand
That I needed to be treated
Just like any other man
I sat my little child down
When he was old enough to know
I said I fell in this big wide world
You're gonna be all kinda froze
I said son it all comes down to just one simple rule
That you treat everybody just the way
You want them to treat you

In Matthew 7:12 Jesus says, "Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the law and the prophets."

In Luke 6:31 Jesus says, "And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise."

In Leviticus 19:18 it says, "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your countrymen. Love your fellow as yourself. I am the Lord."

No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted. What we do for ourselves alone dies with us. What we do for others remains and lives forever. The good things in our lives that we remember the most, that we never forget, and which leave a lasting impression on us, are the times when someone has shown us love and an act of kindness. We tend to be very understanding and forgiving of our own shortcomings, but we are very judgmental and condemning of the shortcomings of others. Let me conclude with a quote from the Holy Synod of Bishops of the OCA: "Brothers and sisters, Saint Justin Martyr, writing at a time when Christians were persecuted in the second century, said, "We used to hate and destroy one another and refused to associate with people of another race or country. Now, because of Christ, we live together with such people and pray for our enemies." May that same spirit be ours today as well." Amen.