

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

“In this manner”, the Lord taught the Twelve, “therefore pray:…forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us…” What does this mean? “We pray in this petition that our Father in heaven would not look upon our sins, nor on their account deny our prayer; for we are worthy of none of the things for which we pray, neither have we deserved them; but that He would grant them all to us by grace; for we daily sin much and indeed deserve nothing but punishment. So will we also heartily forgive, and readily do good, to those who sin against us.”

“…forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us…” That is your prayer. The Prayer is the perfect prayer, the Prayer the Lord bids His Church pray that your petitions be in perfect accord with His will. “We pray in this petition that our Father in heaven would not look upon our sins…” That is your confession. The confession is that which you yourself made when you were confirmed, before God and the congregation; for they are the words of the catechism, which you publicly vowed is your own confession.

They are hard words, strong words. By them you confess that you do sin, and that on account of your sin God ought rightly deny your prayers. You confessed that you haven’t deserved the things for which you pray. And that confession is tied immediately to the Lord’s Words “forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.”

Therefore the Kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with His servants. You get the picture. You have desired to be forgiven your ten thousand talent debt, a lifetime of income for a very wealthy man, the debt to God that you rightly owe for a lifetime of sins. And yet at the same time refusing to forgive the one who owes you a few hundred pence, a minute fraction of your debt. Hear again the catechism, which you publicly vowed is your confession: “So will we also heartily forgive, and readily do good, to those who sin against us.”

So then the Words of the King to the servant, freed from debt, that would not forgive the debt owed him, have been words for you: “You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant…? And the Master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to Him.”

It is a Kingdom parable, an earthly way of speaking about the Kingdom of God. So the King handing an impenitent sinner over to the torturers is the most horrible of fates. But it is the just punishment for anyone who, begging the forgiveness of the King, holds the sins of others against them, while failing to forgive others as the merciful King has forgiven him.

Have you? Have you held a grudge? Have you remained angry? Have you been vindictive or spiteful, desiring to “get back” at someone else? Have you found it hard to forgive others, seeing their sins as greater than yours? Are there divisions in the congregation, in your family, among your friends, between your neighbors, coworkers, fellow students, resulting from transgressions that you have failed to forgive?

The inability, the unwillingness, the refusal to forgive is a disease of the heart and the soul. It embitters, it creates divisions, it weighs you down with a spiritual sickness that only gets worse.

Consider the sharp divisions in our country today, and the hatred openly expressed by many. Ultimately, refusing to forgive others does much greater harm to you than to anyone else. Remember the Words of the Lord: “For so the Heavenly Father will also do if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.”

The answer, the resolution, the rectification, the correction, the solution, your redemption, your salvation, you have already confessed: “but that He would grant them all to us by grace...” It is a Kingdom parable. It is an earthly way of speaking about the Kingdom of God. And in God’s Kingdom, there is grace. There is mercy. The King is benevolent and kind. He forgives. He forgives debt that is incredibly large. He forgives what is unforgivable in the fallen world.

Like the ten thousand talents, your sin has been a lifetime of debt, an amount impossible to repay. But the King has had mercy upon you. In the mercy He showed the indebted servant, the King has forgiven your debt, the debt your transgressions have incurred with God. For the Master was moved with compassion, released you, and forgave you all your debt. He did it in love. He did it because that is the kind of God He is.

Indeed, He did more than forgive your debt. He Himself paid your debt. The Master of the Kingdom humbled Himself. For you, the Master became a Servant. He took your debt upon Himself, the very debt you owed to Him, the entirety of the debt you owe to your neighbor. He made it all His. He settled your account with God.

He paid with His life. He paid with His Blood, shedding it for your transgressions, pouring it out on the altar of the cross that you be forgiven. It is He, the Master Himself, that was handed over to the torturers until He paid all that was due, all that was due for the sins of the world.

The Words of the Proverb were fulfilled in Christ, the True Son of David, the True King of Israel, the True Master. For there, on Calvary, the Son did not despise the chastening, He did not detest the correction, rather being sinless and yet covered in sin, He endured the cross, scorning its shame. Christ is the Wisdom of God. He, Wisdom, who endured the tree of the cross, is a Tree of Life to you who take hold of Him, and brings happiness to you who retain Him. In Him you are a son in whom God the Father delights.

In Christ your unfathomable debt is forgiven, your sins are forgiven. So the Words of the Proverb are fulfilled in you. For happy are you who find Christ, you who by His Spirit gain understanding, for the proceeds of the Kingdom of God are better than the profits of silver, her gain more than fine gold. She, the Holy Church, the Bride, is more precious than rubies. Length of days is in her right hand, for He who defeated death, He who ascended to the Right Hand of the Father grants you everlasting life.

The ways are ways of the Holy Church are pleasantness, and Her paths are peace. So it is that you pray “forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us”, for you know that you have been forgiven in Christ. By the grace of God He gives you the faith to forgive others, and to know the joy and the freedom that brings.

St. Matthew 18:21-35
The Fourth Sunday after Michaelmass, 2018 A.✠ D.

He makes you One with your brothers and sisters, One Holy Church, One Holy Communion, as you kneel and receive the One Lord and Master who died for you, your Lord who reconciles you to God and neighbor.

For the Kingdom of Heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with His servants. He settled your account by paying the price in full Himself. And this day He bids you come, take and eat, take and drink of the fruits of His Tree of Life, His Body and Blood.

He bids you eat and drink that strengthened and preserved by His Holy Sacrament, your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

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