

NINETEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST,

SEPTEMBER 24/OCTOBER 7, 2007

II COR. 11:31-12:9

LUKE 6:31-36

by

Fr. Dr. Photios+ (W)

Gospel: And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.

For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them.

And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same.

And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again.

But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.

Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.

The greatest virtue is love. If we love God, we will keep His commandments.¹ We are to love everyone, even our enemies,² and our response to their hatred is love. How do we achieve this zenith of love? By loving all equally as God does. Christ opens His arms for all to come to Him to be saved and thus “come into the knowledge of truth”.³

Reciprocate hatred with love by blessing and praying for those who despise you.⁴ I.e., turn your other cheek!⁵ By loving our neighbours, we find love in Christ and put off the “old man”.⁶ We must be ever vigilant, though, remember our nature is fallen, so it takes a maximum effort to love our neighbour and thus love Christ as the Gospel commands. Imitate Christ in all His loving ways! The Gospel graphically details, time and again, His infinite love for us, His continual forgiving of those who persecuted Him.

Do not be ashamed that you are tempted to shun the Lord’s commandments. The prince of *this* world, the evil one, tempts us. We are presented and lured by his choices, some quite subtle, throughout our lives. Only through the Lord’s grace can his evil machinations be thwarted. This takes sacrifice and struggle. We can do it. Following the Gospel and thus the Lord, we will emerge victorious from this unseen combat.⁷ The evil one is powerful in *this* world, but he is no match for Christ and His grace, the grace *not of this world*.

See God in your neighbour, and He will extend His grace to you. Loving Him perfectly requires the same love for one's neighbour. We must see God's image in every neighbour. If we love our neighbour perfectly, we love God.

The Gospel is not merely to be read, absorbed as a historical novel, it is to be lived! Experienced! It is not enough to engage in theoretical theological analysis, as if in a science course. What is needed is spiritual action! We are spiritual warriors engaging in unseen warfare.⁸ Once we accept that we must renounce ourselves and love God and work for Him by loving our neighbours; once we have learnt what is Christian perfection, we will need to arm ourselves with four invisible weapons in order to attain final spiritual victory. These have been passed on to us by one of the greatest Saints, St. Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain. They are: "(a) never rely on yourself in anything; (b) bear always in your heart a perfect and all-daring trust in God alone; (c) strive without ceasing; and (d) remain constantly in prayer."⁹

It is insufficient to only love those who love us:

To love and to do good to those who love and do good to us is no virtue, no accomplishment; even heathens do so,¹⁰ as well as robbers, thieves and bandits, men who have no trace of virtue. And if we love those close to us, our friends and acquaintances, we have done nothing more than the heathens."¹¹

Christ is our standard, nothing less. The same standard exists for both monastics and others, just a somewhat different avenue of attaining deification. If we simply love those who love us, our parents, spouses, other relatives and friends, we have fallen short of God's love commandment. Loving those who love us means we are like the sinners and Gentiles. Even the gangster Sopranos¹² may love one another...

Blessed +Theophylact¹³ puts it this way:

if you love those who love you, you are like sinners and the Gentiles; but if you love those who do evil to you, you are like God, *Who is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil* [emphasis supplied] Which do you desire, to be like sinners, or to be like God?

Our lot as Christians is to take aggressive spiritual action to love our enemies, not just our loved ones, following Christ and His teachings. Loving only those who love us is below the requisite Holy Threshold, which is to "show great love *even* (emphasis supplied) towards our enemies:"¹⁴ Let us put on the Holy Spirit, Who will nurture and guide us to this Holy Threshold if we sacrifice and struggle to become images of God.

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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- ¹ cf. St. John 14:23.
- ² St. Luke 6:27.
- ³ Hieromonk German Ciuba (tr. from the Slavonic into English), *The Gospel Commentary*, Nineteenth Sunday After Pentecost, Russian Orthodox Church of the Nativity (Old Rite), Erie, PA, 2002, p.437.
- ⁴ St. Luke 6:28.
- ⁵ St. Luke 6: 29.
- ⁶ The evil one, devil, the prince of *this* world.
- ⁷ See “Love Thy Neighbour,” <http://www.orthodox.net/articles/love-thy-neighbor.html>, p.2 of 5.
- ⁸ See St. Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain (ed.) and revised by Bishop Theophan the Recluse, (tr. by E. Kadloubovsky & G.E.H. Palmer), *Unseen Warfare*, St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, Crestwood, New York, 2000.
- ⁹ *id.*, Chapter One, in particular, p.81.
- ¹⁰ St. Matthew 5:46-47.
- ¹¹ Ciuba, *The Gospel Commentary*, *op cit.*, p.440.
- ¹² of cable television ‘fame’.
- ¹³ Bl. Theophylact, *The Explanation of the Holy Gospel of St. Luke, Volume III* (Bl. Theophylact’s Explanation of the New Testament) (tr. from the original Greek by Fr. Christopher Stade), Chrysostom Press, House Springs, MO, 1997, explaining St. Luke 6: 27-36, p.68.
- ¹⁴ St. John Chrysostom, *Homily XVIII on Matthew V*, 9,10, B#54, pp.128-129, quoted in Johanna Manley (compiler/editor), *The Bible and the Holy Fathers for Orthodox*, Monastery Books, Crestwood, New York, 1999, 19th Sunday After Pentecost, p.424.

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