



Forgiveness Sunday: The Reading is from Matthew 6:14-21

The Lord said, "If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

"And when you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face that your fasting may not be seen by men but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Resurrectional Apolytikion in the Fourth Tone

Having learned the joyful proclamation of the Resurrection from the Angel, and having cast off the ancestral condemnation, the women disciples of the Lord spake to the Apostles exultantly: Death is despoiled and Christ God is risen, granting great mercy to the world.

Seasonal Kontakion in the Plagal of the Second Tone

O Master, Prudence, Guide of Wisdom, Instruction to the foolish and Defender of the poor, strengthen my heart and grant it discernment. Give me words, Word of the Father, for behold, I shall not keep my lips from crying out to You, "O Merciful One, have mercy on me who has fallen."

Discussion

The Sunday of Forgiveness, the last of the preparatory Sundays before Great Lent, has two themes: it commemorates Adam's expulsion from Paradise, and it accentuates our need for forgiveness.

One of the primary images in the Triodion is that of **the return to Paradise**. Lent is a time when we weep with Adam and Eve before the closed gate of Eden, repenting with them for the sins that have deprived us of our free communion with God. But Lent is also a time when we are preparing to celebrate the saving event of Christ's death and rising, which has reopened Paradise to us once more (Luke 23:43). So sorrow for our exile in sin is tempered by hope of our re-entry into Paradise.

The second theme, that of **forgiveness**, is emphasized in the Gospel reading for this Sunday (Matthew 6:14-21) and in the special ceremony of mutual forgiveness at the end of the Vespers on Sunday evening. Before we enter the Lenten fast, we are reminded that there can be no true fast, no genuine repentance, no reconciliation with God, unless we are at the same time reconciled with one another. A fast without mutual love is the fast of demons. We do not travel the road of Lent as isolated individuals but as members of a family. Our asceticism and fasting should not separate us from others, but should link us to them with ever-stronger bonds. The Sunday of Forgiveness also directs us to see that Great Lent is a journey of liberation from our enslavement to sin.

The Gospel lesson sets the conditions for this liberation.

The first one is **fasting—the refusal to accept the desires and urges of our fallen nature as normal**, the effort to free ourselves from the dictatorship of the flesh and matter over the spirit. To be effective, however, our fast must not be hypocritical, a “showing off.” We must “appear not unto men to fast but to our Father who is in secret” (vv. 16-18).

The second condition is **forgiveness— “If you forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you”** (vv. 14-15). The triumph of sin, the main sign of its rule over the world, is division, opposition, separation, hatred. Therefore, the first break through this fortress of sin is forgiveness. To forgive is to put between me and my “enemy” the radiant forgiveness of God Himself. To forgive is to reject the hopeless “dead-ends” of human relations and to refer them to Christ. Forgiveness is truly a “breakthrough” of the Kingdom into this sinful and fallen world.

Forgive so you can be forgiven.

Who lives in this world and does not sin? Don't believe for a second that:

1. You don't fall into sin everyday.
2. You can commit a sin that cannot be forgiven.

All you have to do is forgive others. Then do the things that Our Lord commands.
Do good.