



My Beloved Ones,

When we think of our Lord's earthly ministry, it can become easy to underestimate the power of what He meant. The words, "*As you wish that men would do to you, do so to them*" (Luke 6:31) are so well known that many approach the phrase as one would a greeting card: an ideal piece of common sense which is echoed by many other philosophies throughout the world.

We would do well to remember that our Lord came to a world that was fixated on the ideas of retribution and justice. In both ancient pagan and Jewish law, an evildoer was expected to be punished to the fullest extent of the crime committed. Christ Himself knows and understands this human weakness for revenge. "*You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also*" (Matthew 5:38-39).

Many have struggled with this idea of selflessness, finding the denial so difficult as to be almost inhuman. This, however, is precisely the radical theological point Christ seeks to raise: it is not in our sinful fallen nature to love everyone equally— but it is in God's nature, for, as we read in the First Epistle of John, "*...God is love*".

Christ understands that human nature demands a kind of give and take, but He is not asking us to behave like other people. As He wisely observes, "*...even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again*" (Luke 6:32-34). We, who have been set apart from the world as His disciples, have received a hire calling than to imitate the world.

"*Be merciful,*" our Lord insists, "*even as your Father in Heaven is merciful*" (Luke 6:36). The reward for the very real and ever-present struggle of following this important aspect of Orthodoxy is often mistakenly thought to be because we wish to gain entrance to Heaven. In reality, the struggle is itself a transformative process on our journey to becoming both one with God in Heaven, and also like God. So we can see that the struggle is, in the end, part of its own reward.

My brothers and sisters, in a world so beset by evil, with wrongdoers escaping punishment, it is only natural that the human mind cries out for some logical sense of order, one that we ourselves strive to impose. However, as Orthodox Christians, we would do well to remember that our focus is always to imitate and remain closer to our Creator, who, in His infinite wisdom and tenderness "*...is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish*" (Luke 6:36).

My hope and prayer is that we all continue to meditate on these things. However impossible and contrary they may seem, let never forget that, "*...with God all things are possible*" (Matthew 19:26).

+ALEXIOS
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