

August 10, 2018

Greetings to all the Faithful of St. Andrew's,

Christ is among us!

The Gospel for this coming Sunday is Matthew 18:23-35 and contains a parable. This parable deals with *the* commandment (based on love) for Christian behavior, which is forgiveness. The verses immediately preceding this reading introduce the parable as follows: *"Peter came up and said to him, 'Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?'"* Jesus said to him, *"I do not say to you seven times, but seventy times seven"* (vs.21-22). Peter is seeking clarification on the limits on forgiveness. In the teaching of Moses, retribution was allowed but a limitation was set at "an eye for an eye." This was a limit to retribution, not a command to engage in it. Peter suggests 7 times as an adequate number before retribution should be enacted. The number seven is a heavenly number and represents God, so in one sense Peter is correct if he means to say, "forgive as God forgives." But Jesus, thinking that Peter is actually counting 1, 2, 3 etc., underscores this heavenly number 7, lest there be any misunderstanding of God's expectations for the Christian. He responds by emphasizing not a limitation but an unlimited forgiveness with the words *"seventy times seven."* This kind of forgiveness has as its foundation the mercy, compassion, and patience of God. This teaching is obviously a warning to believers who are continually taught about the mercy, compassion and patience of God given to them. Take note how many times in the Divine Liturgy we hear the words "mercy," "compassion," "love," and "forgiveness," and related words. Notice also how we are taught the truth that we are "unworthy" of God's grace in so many ways.

After Jesus responds to Peter, he tells the Disciples a parable about forgiveness as a non-negotiable aspect of life and conduct for citizens of God's Kingdom. Notice Jesus starts with the words "the kingdom of heaven may be compared to . . ." (v.23). The individual in the parable was required to forgive, but because he did not forgive his brother who owed him less than he himself owed his master, a debt which was significantly larger, he was condemned. The Gospel reading ends with the following words: "So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart" (v.35). Forgiveness is central. It is received by us and must be given by us to others. None other than the Lord Jesus himself emphasized the importance of this teaching. I will therefore end this message with the Lord's prayer and the verse which immediately follows it for those of us who seek to live in the Father's kingdom:

*"Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our debts, As we also have forgiven our debtors; And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil. For 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" (Matthew 6:9-15).*

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Yours in Christ,

Fr. Herman

