

“Love your enemies!” Luke 6:27-38

“But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them. “If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. “Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you.”

What we have for our today’s meditations is Luke’s account on what is probably the most famous speech in the history – the Sermon on the Mount. It means that we have this incredible opportunity and privilege to listen to Jesus Himself speaking to His disciples, which means also to us.

Jesus Himself speaking to us... And what a message it is! Jesus tells us what it means to be a Christian, a child of God, how we should lead our lives. And these are not some sort of vague suggestions. This is how He expects us to live.

But before we begin reflecting of what demands Jesus places of His followers, we need to step back so that we can see these demands in their proper light and place. We need to remember that our God never demands us to act first.

Even in the Sermon on the Mount, or Luke’s account of it, God’s abundant blessings come before His demands. And even more so in our lives. He is our Creator. He bestows upon us and sustains the gift of life.

And even before we are born, He prepares a place for us, this wonderful planet Earth. Even before we know the need for Savior, He sends His Son to become one of us, to take upon Him all our sins and death, and in exchange to give us forgiveness and life with Him forever.

The Holy Spirit comes to us and does what we can’t do ourselves. He changes our wicked hearts, He creates in us the trust in true God and He gently and patiently leads us to Jesus, so that we can know the loving heart of our God.

All of this happens by sheer grace of our Heavenly Father. He makes us members of His own family. And only then, only then He teaches us how to live as His children. It makes sense, when we think about it.

Whatever we do, whichever way we behave, none of that could make us members of, let's say, the royal family. But, if by God's grace we are made members of such family, then that inevitably puts new responsibilities on us.

To live in such a way that would reflect the nature of the family that we represent. In our today's reading we hear Jesus teaching exactly that. How to live out our identity of God's children so that we truthfully represent what our divine family is about. Let's hear what Jesus says.

And what He says first is "**but I say to you who hear...**". What is going on? He is not addressing those who listen to Him, but those who actually hear Him. That is, those who take His words to their hearts, who continue to think about them and most importantly, who try to live them out in their lives.

The same is true for us. Many listen the readings we read. Many listen what pastors preach. But how many actually hear what God Himself speaks to us in His Word and how many take it to the heart and strive to live accordingly?

Perhaps it is not the easiest thing to lead a decent life even in the eyes of this world. But probably it isn't the hardest thing either. Jesus reflects on it as well. He says what we all know and have experienced.

That people tend to love those who love them, and that they tend to do good to those who do good to them, and that they often lend to those who will pay them back. Or we can say that we love and do good to our people. Jesus puts it in these words: "**Even sinners do the same.**"

At the same time we can treat with contempt and miserably those whom we don't consider our people. I am sure that most of you would have seen and perhaps also experienced it in your lives.

It happens in schools, it happens in workplaces, it happens in society. And unfortunately it happens also in the Church. When we are nice and welcoming to our people... but at the same time can show a very different attitude, or no attitude at all, to those who are not our people.

The bottom line is – it is not a big deal to be nice to your own people. That is just a common sense, something necessary for our survival in this world and life in society. We all need a support network. Even sinners do the same.

This is where Jesus' demands to His people, to Christians kick in. This is where we can see how radical Jesus' demands are. In fact, we could say how unreasonable in the eyes of this world and how humanly impossible they are.

Just listen once more. Those who hear. "**Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not**

demand them back. [...] But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return...”.

What Jesus expects from His followers, from us, is neither reasonable nor doable. It is impossible for us in our own power, living in this world and daily fighting for our survival. Why would anyone live that way?

But... we know the answer. What Jesus demands is impossible for mere man. But nothing is impossible for God. Nothing is impossible for those who are united with the true God. For those who have received the Holy Spirit.

For when our Creator and Redeemer comes to us and speaks to us, He also unites us with Himself by means of the indwelling of His Spirit. And the Holy Spirit turns our little and “reasonable” worlds upside down.

He brings us in this infinitely greater divine reality where we are not alone anymore. Where the Triune God is the source of every good gift, where Jesus Christ has received all authority in heavens and on earth, and reigns victorious.

The Holy Spirit expands our little world that we inhabit and brings us to the reality where this age is just a ‘prelude to the age to come. Where the true life, eternal life in God’s presence, adventurous and joyful, is what matters the most.

Where this life and this world, as important as they are, will perish giving place to the imperishable, the New Heavens, New Earth and new bodies. Once we begin to inhabit that much larger world, our God Himself enables us to live out our identity as God’s children. We are enabled to love our enemies.

It doesn’t mean that we would somehow like those people who hate us, or curse us, or abuse us. Of course, not. But as God’s children, we are able to see that they too are created in God’s Image and Likeness.

That they are enslaved to their sins. That Jesus has died to free them from their sins and that by God’s grace one day they may become our brothers and sisters in Christ. And if that is so, then it really isn’t that hard to care about our brothers and sisters in Christ, is it?

Once we see everyone this way, not only our people, but everyone, we are enabled to love them, to care for them, to pray for them. This is what we do as congregation and as individual Christians, when we pray for those who persecute us, for those who are hostile to us, for those who abuse us. For we hope that one day we will rejoice together with them in God’s Kingdom.

We may still wonder what the purpose of living such life is, where you are patient when injustice is done to you, when you don’t fight when something is unfairly taken from you, when you don’t scream from the bottom of your lungs that “my rights are being violated!”

For one, everything that we have in this world is ... yes, given to us by our gracious Father. Whatever we have we have received it as underserved gifts.

And if we can use these gifts, that belong to God, to witness about our Father and our Lord Jesus, that's great. But the main point is this, that we already belong to the world much greater than this, and that is God's promise to us that if we live as Jesus Himself did and as He instructs us, then our reward will be great in heavens, in the life to come.

And by living so we will be children of our Father, for He, too **"is kind to the ungrateful and the evil"**. **"Be, therefore, merciful, even as your Father is merciful"**. See, this is our opportunity to show that this age will pass, and that something much greater is to come. And that is where our hearts belong.

We are not afraid to suffer injustice, or lose some of our materials possession in this age, for we know that so much more is to come, especially if we remain faithful to our Lord. Thus, empowered by the Holy Spirit, we can live as Jesus' disciples, which may seem weak and foolish to the world. But for us it is the very opposite, God's wisdom and true manifestation of God's power in us.

Jesus also mentions what people often call "The Golden Rule". **"As you wish that others would do to you, do so to them."** This is so often misunderstood as pleasing the desires of our sinful flesh. Just do for people what they want.

Jesus doesn't say this to everybody. He says this to His disciples, to those who hear Him, and who value eternal life with Jesus above everything else. And such people don't just desire anything.

They desire everything that brings them closer to Jesus, that helps them to fight the good fight and to keep the faith. Therefore, we could say that the proper meaning of this phrase is – do to others whatever you can to bring them closer to Jesus and to lead them to eternal life.

A few more words on **"Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you"**. Again this is one of these misused sayings of Jesus.

Jesus doesn't prohibit us from speaking the truth, or proclaiming God's will for our lives, or calling our brothers or sisters to repentance, none of these. For by doing so we can save them. What Jesus is speaking against is our arrogant and hypocritical attitude.

When we imagine that we are better than others and therefore can look down to them. When we don't see that we ourselves are sinners, perhaps even in much worse state, than those whom we want to judge.

This command invites us to be humble and gentle when we speak with our brothers and sisters. And when we need to speak the words of rebuke, and that happens, we do it caring for their salvation, and not to elevate ourselves.

Summarizing we could say that we need to be conscious that whatever we do as Christians, it bears witness about our God. People can't erase the knowledge of

God from their hearts. But when they don't know Jesus, they naturally perceive God as the Judge. We should do whatever we can, so that our lives would help them to see merciful and forgiving God, the Father of our Lord Jesus and our Father. And for us, chosen by God, called by the Gospel, and enlightened by the Holy Spirit, this is not as burdensome a task as it may appear.

For Jesus doesn't instruct us to do anything that He Himself hadn't done. Besides, He doesn't instruct us to do it on our own, instead He Himself walks with us and His Spirit continually shapes us to be more like Jesus.

And finally, as we respond to God's love and try to obey Him, these words should accompany us. **“For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap.”** From what I can recall this is one of the most abundant illustration of God's blessings in the Bible.

How will God deal with you, you, faithful servant? This is how! The measure of God's blessings will be pressed down, and shaken, for there is so much, and even then it will be running over... in abundance of God's grace.

It is so good to be children of God. We are free to love our enemies, free to be unreasonably patient and forgiving, we are free to be prodigally generous and humble, for we do not belong to this age, but to much greater world. And it is coming soon. Amen.