

Small Groups Curriculum

Week of March 14, 2021

OPENING PRAYER

Shine in our hearts, O Master Who loves mankind, the pure light of Your divine knowledge, and open the eyes of our mind that we may comprehend the proclamations of Your Gospels. Instill in us also reverence for Your blessed commandments so that, having trampled down all carnal desires, we may lead a spiritual life, both thinking and doing all those things that are pleasing to You. For You, Christ our God, are the illumination of our souls and bodies, and to You we offer up glory, together with Your Father, Who is without beginning, and Your all-holy, good, and life-creating Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.

Prayer Before the Reading of the Gospel
Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom

THIS SUNDAY'S SCRIPTURE READINGS

For Forgiveness Sunday

SUNDAY EPISTLE

St. Paul's Letter to the Romans 13:11-14; 14:1-4

SUNDAY GOSPEL

The Gospel According to Matthew 6:14-21

All readings are available at goarch.org or the Daily Readings app.

EPISTLE READING

Brethren, salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed; the night is far gone, the day is at hand. Let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

As for the man who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not for disputes over opinions. One believes he may eat anything, while the weak man eats only vegetables. Let not him who eats despise him who abstains, and let not him who abstains pass judgment on him who eats; for God has welcomed him. Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for God is able to make him stand.

GOSPEL READING

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."

Discussion

INTRO NOTES

1. Staying Focused

- A. In the Epistle, Saint Paul warns us that it's not our place to focus on the shortcomings of others
 - i. "Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls"
- B. In the Gospel, Jesus warns that our inability to forgive others will lead to our own condemnation
 - i. "If you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses"
- C. Our task is to focus on our own repentance rather than get distracted by the sins of others

2. A Time of Preparation

- A. As we enter Great Lent, Saint Paul encourages us to behave like Christians
 - i. "Let us conduct ourselves becomingly as in the day..."
- B. Jesus also speaks of proper conduct as laying a foundation for a life of holiness and an experience of God's Kingdom
 - i. "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven"
- C. This is a time to focus on holy things and direct our heart towards holy things, "for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also"

3. God Lifts Us Up

- A. Saint Paul observes that we shouldn't tear people down through our judgment because God wants to lift us all up
 - i. "He will be upheld, for God is able to make him stand"
- B. Similarly Jesus tells us that holiness isn't about receiving credit from people, or somehow competing with others, but rather on opening ourselves to God who lifts us up
 - i. "Your Father who sees in secret will reward you"
- C. We should keep our hearts open to the true reward of God's grace, not the destructive pleasure of tearing others down or vainly lifting ourselves up in an unhealthy way

For more on this Sunday's Gospel reading, watch:
[Live the Word #22 | Why You Need to Forgive](#)

Discussion

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How are you feeling right now?
2. How do you keep your eyes focused on your own spiritual journey?
How do you avoid falling into judgment or condemnation of others?
3. Do you find that Lent or other periods of preparation make the struggle to forgive any easier? Why or why not?
4. Is there anyone in your life that you've had trouble forgiving? What steps can you take to open your heart to them?

If you don't get through all the questions, that's ok!

Discussion

WRAP-UP NOTES

Each Wrap-Up should be personal and based on your time together as a Small Group. These three questions can help you, as a Small Group Leader, wrap up your weekly meeting:

1. What are you grateful to have learned or heard in the conversation?
2. What simple statement or question from the conversation can you share again that would be most helpful to hear again three years from now?
3. If you could share up to twelve words on the topic of “forgiveness” what would you say?

AT THE END OF MEETINGS

We give thanks to You, invisible King, Who by Your boundless power fashioned the universe, and in the multitude of Your mercy brought all things from nothing into being. Look down from heaven, O Master, upon those who have bowed their heads before You; for they have not bowed before flesh and blood, but before You, the awesome God. Therefore, O Master, make smooth and beneficial for us all, whatever lies ahead, according to the need of each: Sail with those who sail; travel with those who travel; heal the sick, Physician of our souls and bodies. Through the grace, compassion, and love for mankind of Your only-begotten Son, with whom You are blessed, together with Your all-holy, good, and life-creating Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.

Prayer Following the Lord’s Prayer
Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom