



SECOND SUNDAY OF LUKE

September 24

THE GOSPEL READING

Luke 6:31-36

[Love of Enemies]

The Lord said, "As you wish that men would do to you, do so to them. If you love those who love you, what credit 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 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. 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 selfish. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful."

THE SERMON

When Jesus begins His ministry, He goes up on a mountain to pray, and prays all night. When the day dawns, He gathers His disciples, and chooses twelve of them to be His Apostles. Now, He begins to teach them what it means to be His disciples, and what it means to be transformed into His likeness. When He teaches them, He teaches us. We learn that following Christ involves reorienting our whole beings. It means being transformed in our soul (in Greek, ἡ ψυχὴ), mind (in Greek, ὁ νοῦς), and body (in Greek, τὸ σῶμα).



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After teaching about what it means to live a blessed life, Jesus warns His disciples about receiving praise from those who oppose the coming of the Kingdom of God. The Lord warns that to live and act like Him will inevitably cause hostility from those who live by the world's ethics rather than God's love. It is in this context that the Lord teaches about the love of enemies. In other words, the Lord says that if the world hates us, remember that it hated Him before it hated us (John 15:18). And He also says, "love your enemies." We see that this is *precisely* what Jesus did.

Sometimes, the concept of "love" can be distorted to mean very different things in our times. However, the Lord teaches us what *genuine* love means and how it is expressed concretely. We see the meaning of true love through what God has done and continues to do for us. Jesus Christ is the Eternal Son of God, the Logos Who is, Who was, and Who ever shall be. He has no beginning and no end. All things are created through Him for us. He is before all things, and in Him, all things exist. The act of creation itself, is an act of His profound love.

Yet, we, His beloved creation, turned away from Him in the Garden of Eden by desiring to become gods without God, and do the same today by idolizing other things instead of God. Still, He nevertheless chooses to become Incarnate (taking on human flesh) for our salvation. He took on human nature without any sin, yet with all the weaknesses of human nature. He hungered, thirsted, sweated blood, was betrayed, beaten, crucified, and buried. He did it all because of His great love for us, to redeem and restore us to our original unity with Him that we once enjoyed in the Garden of Eden. He destroyed death by death and rose from the grave to give us eternal life.

He ascended to Heaven from the Mount of Olives in order to prepare a place for us to live with Him forever by uniting our broken humanity to his Divine Person. He did it all because of His unending love for us, for God died for us even though we rejected His love and chose instead to crucify Him. The Resurrection is the center of our Faith, and it is what gives us not only eternal life in heaven, but new life now. It is only in this new life that we can truly love and forgive our enemies and do good to them.

It is this love that the Lord teaches us by His example. It is an unselfish love that desires the eternal good of our loved ones for their own sake. A concrete love, expressed not only in words, but in acts, as Christ did for us. His love has opened the doors for us to enter the Kingdom of Heaven and given us the grace of the Holy Spirit to be united with Him. We are transformed by this unity of Divinity and humanity. That is why He teaches and models what it truly means to love, and He also hopes that we love one another as He has loved us.

To be united to Christ by obeying His commandments and receiving the Holy Sacraments transforms us into His image and likeness, just as He descended from Heaven to take on our humanity. From His grace, we receive the greatest gifts, and therefore, we also receive great responsibility. We learn what love means from Him, and He teaches us

to love as He does because He gives us the grace to do so. If we receive forgiveness and love from God when we may not deserve it, even if we turn our backs on Him, we now have the ability and responsibility to love others — even our enemies.

When we do so, we begin to mirror the heart of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

As Christ says, we are molded into being children of the Most High, for He is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish. The world often turns away from God, but God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son to give us eternal life. He was loving and merciful to us, so now He teaches us to be merciful, even as our Father is merciful.

Genuine love, therefore, is a love directed at all people, even our enemies. It is a concrete love. The Lord tells us to love our enemies and do good. There is an emphasis on the whole person expressing love, not only in the heart but in the actions of doing good and even giving one's possessions without expecting anything in return. It is a selfless love that not only forgives the wrongs done to us but actively seeks to bless those who have injured us.

Saint Porphyrios the Kafsokalyvite says, "When someone injures us in whatever way, whether with slanders or with insults, we should think of him as our brother who has been taken hold of by the enemy. He has fallen victim to the enemy. Accordingly, we need to have compassion for him and entreat God to have mercy both on us and on him, and God will help both." And Saint Silouan the Athonite says, "He who will not love his enemies cannot come to know the Lord and the sweetness of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit teaches us to love our enemies so that the soul pities them as if they were her own children."

God does not want us to be merely nice people. The Gospel is not simply the good news that God is nice, so we should be nice. It is much more than that. Even when we were not nice, God's fierce love endured suffering and the Cross to give us the Resurrection and eternal life. This true love is what He has implanted in our hearts through the Holy Sacraments empowered by the Holy Spirit. We are now His children, bearing His image and likeness so we can love as He does. We can do to others as we wish they would do to us.

It is good not to return evil for evil. However, it is by Divine Power that we return good for evil, which the Lord calls us to do. He calls us to be genuine and authentic Christians. That means we will be ready to forgive, give selflessly, and help whoever is asking for help whenever we are asked, no matter the circumstances. He calls us to offer sacrificial love, which means forgiving even our worst enemies. He awaits the best from us because He has given us all things.

The Lord knows our weaknesses. Sometimes, we fall short and cannot be as good as we intend. He loves us regardless and helps our weaknesses and needs through His grace. Therefore, let us not lose hope when we fall, because God is full of understanding, mercy, and love. When we remember and experience His grace, we become channels of His love unto others — especially our enemies. Those against us need our love more than anyone because only love can truly transform the world — never hatred.

God loves us even though we crucified Him. Likewise, we are called to imitate Him, and do good to those who do evil unto us because evil can only be dispelled by love — nothing else. Let us follow the example of the life and death of Jesus and show love to every person we encounter so we can eliminate the evil of the world and fill it instead with Christ's love.