

Tolerance (2nd) (19/9/2021)

The subject of our previous homily was that of tolerance towards one another with love.

When we hear the exhortation of the Apostle Paul to "*forbear one another...*" (Colossians 3:13), questions and even objections may arise:

"If someone insults, harms or slanders us for no reason, why should we not react? Are we not just encouraging this unjust behavior?"

If we (out of love) are interested in helping the other person to change, it is indeed worth it to do everything possible. This of course has to be done with prayer and peace in the heart. There cannot be anger, a raised voice, threats, and above all, no thoughts of retaliation or revenge for the evil. If we truly care about the spiritual health of the one who wronged us, then let us follow the example of the One who endured spitting, beating and the nails. The Lord even told us what to do in these situations (see Matthew 18:15). But if the person persists in their bad behavior, despite doing all we can, then let us show even more tolerance and sacrificial love for the sake of Christ. As the Lord tolerates everything, even our own disobedience, insults and all kinds of sins, let us do the same for our fellow human beings. After all, the offending person is usually a relative, friend or partner, and deserves every effort on our part. We must have faith that God will see the endurance, tolerance, and love coming from us, and will Himself reveal the truth of the matter.

St. John Chrysostom, as is well known, suffered much in his life. He was persecuted, deposed, and exiled. While in exile, he wrote a treatise which speaks on this: "if one does not harm oneself – by violating the will of God – no one else can harm that person". This is guaranteed, because on our side is the Righteous and Almighty God. God will not only give them justice, but also reward them, due to the tolerant attitude they showed to those who wronged and slandered them. Among the many examples from the Bible he mentions is the case of Joseph. His brothers envied him, and they sold him as a slave. He ended up in Egypt, where he was slandered and imprisoned. But God rewarded Joseph for his tolerance and made him the glorious Regent of Egypt, who saved both his own people as well as that of Egypt from starvation.

And what happened to St. John Chrysostom? Because he endured everything with trust in God, God rewarded his tolerance, by solemnly restoring him to the consciousness of the Church and made him a Saint.

The case of St. Nektarios, Metropolitan of Pentapolis is remarkable as well. He was slandered and persecuted, but in the end God revealed his innocence and even made him a great Saint. So let us not be troubled about our place in society, or being

harmed by the bad behavior of others. If we obey God's commandments (avoiding self-harm in doing so), then God will surely defend us in a divine way! Those who wronged and spoke evil of their brothers and sisters are the ones who are truly harmed.

The Holy Fathers of the Church considered such accusers to be their benefactors. To our ears, this sounds weird! They had their reasons, in that they believed that such persecution was an opportunity to practice humility and endurance, and also love. In this way, we may please God and His grace can come upon us.

If someone hears this, and still finds it difficult to contain their anger against the person who has offended them, let them think of their other person's spiritual state. They are not in their right mind, and are not able to hear us or understand that they are following the wrong path. When a doctor has a mentally ill person in front of him and they insult the doctor, what happens? Will the doctor threaten or get angry? Of course not! They know that the illness is the reason they are acting this way. This is exactly how we should treat those who have hurt us, and realize that if they were not afflicted in this way, they could reject such inappropriate behavior, and overcome their passions.

There is a story in the life of St. Paisios the Athonite, where a monk who was in conflict with another monk came to the Saint for advice. This monk had tried to make peace with his brother, but he failed. St. Paisios advised him: "do not say anything to him again, but close yourself in your cell and pray with your prayer rope saying: 'Lord Jesus Christ, by the prayers of my brother (name), have mercy on me'". The monk went and did this. After some time passed, he heard a knock on the door of his cell. When he opened it, he saw the other monk (who the conflict was with), falling to his knees and asking for forgiveness for his bad behavior.

My dear brothers and sisters, in such difficult situations let us not try to resolve our differences with others on our own. Let us turn to our Lord with humility, and with the certainty that the Almighty and Man-loving God and Prince of peace will listen to us, intervening to restore peace among our fellow human beings. Amen.