

WE MUST FORGIVE OTHERS

—by St. Antiochos of Galatia—

To forgive others from the depths of our heart is a commandment given by our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, which is life-saving for every single person— for His commandment is eternal life. If we forgive, we will also be forgiven. If we do not forgive, we securely detain our sins. Now what logical person desiring to have all his innumerable sins forgiven will not proceed to forgive joyfully the few insignificant faults of his fellow man? The Lord not only ordered us to forgive others, but He showed us in practice how we must execute this commandment. While hanging on the Cross, He prayed thus to His own Father on behalf of the the very people who had unjustifiably condemned Him to death: **“Father, forgive them for this sin; for they do not know what they are doing” (Lk. 23:34)**. Behold! The compassionate and exceedingly-good Jesus pleads in their defense: **“They do not know what they are doing.”** In another instance prior to this, when His disciples had become displeased with certain Samaritans who had not welcomed them, and when they requested fire from heaven to be sent to consume them, the Lord rebuked them saying, **“You do not know what spirit you are of” (Lk. 9:54-56)**. That is, you are disciples of the gentle and compassionate Holy Spirit.

The Lord teaches us the same thing through the prophets. The Prophet Zachariah says, **“Render a just judgment, and each one of you show mercy and compassion to his brother” (Zac. 7:9)**. The Apostle Paul advises, **“Become kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you” (Eph. 4:32)**. And the Prophet Obadiah informs us, **“For as you have done it, it shall be done to you in the same manner. Your recompense shall return on your own head” (Ob. 1:15)**.

Thus, we are obligated to sympathize with others and to forgive others, because we are one body and each others’ members, and this is how we must think about others. Furthermore, we must fear the dreadful decision of the Lord Himself, and we must forgive others from the depth of our heart, for He warned, **“This is what My heavenly Father will also do to you if you do not forgive the transgressions of your brother from your hearts” (Mt. 18:35)**.

“You evil servant!” declares the Lord, “I forgave you that entire debt because you begged me. Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant just as I had pity on you? And having become angry, He delivered him to the torturers until he should repay all that he owed” (Mt. 18:32-34).

And when the Apostle Peter asked, **“How many times should I forgive my brother if he sins against me? Is seven times enough?”**, the Lord replied to him: **“I do not say to you up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven” (Mt. 18:21-22)**. This is why He adds, **“For if you forgive ... your heavenly Father will also forgive you” (Mt. 6:14)**. And He further instructs, **“If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day, and seven times a day he returns to you saying, ‘I repent,’ you shall forgive him” (Lk. 17:3-4)**.

To Christ, the compassionate Lord and lover of man, is due all glory unto the ages of ages. Amen.