

Spiritual Commentary on the Gospel Readings of the Days of the Great Lent by Father Louka Sidarous (1)

Sunday Before Great Lent (Preparation Sunday)

The Gospel according to Matthew, 6:1-18.

“Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. 2 Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. 3 But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.

5 “And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. 6 But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. 7 And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words.

8 “Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him. 9 In this manner, therefore, pray:

Our Father in heaven,

Hallowed be Your name.

10 Your kingdom come.

Your will be done

On earth as it is in heaven.

11 Give us this day our daily bread.

12 And forgive us our debts,

As we forgive our debtors.

13 And do not lead us into temptation,

But deliver us from the evil one.

[d]For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

14 “For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

16 “Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. 17 But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 18 so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.”

The gospel of the Sunday before the Great Lent sets the foundations for the conduct by which fasting, prayers, and acts of charity ought to be practiced. In fact, these practices represent an offering of a sacrifice acceptable to the Father.

The only sacrifice that brings gladness to the heart of the Father is the sacrifice offered on the cross by His Son Jesus Christ. Christ, through His love for us, has allowed us to participate in His sacrifice, so that by Him, in Him and through His cross we can offer worship to the Father.

We pray to the Father in secret, in Christ Jesus our Lord. And our Father who beholds the deep inner parts will reward us openly.

We offer acts of charity and compassion in the name of Jesus, the Son of God in truth. We do not let the left hand know of these acts. The left hand here represents the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and their love for public recognition. We offer these acts as a sacrifice within the sacrifice of the cross of Christ. When the Father sees the depth of our love and the bowels of compassion that moves us, He rejoices in us and rewards us openly.

So also concerning the fasting, we offer our bodily sacrifice, to be acceptable, and holy by the mercies of God, as the apostle Paul says. We offer this sacrifice through Him Who fasted on our behalf for forty days and forty nights to please the heart of the Father, to sanctify the flesh of our humanity and to offer it in purity according to His will and gladness.

When we fast, through Christ, and in Him, we take upon ourselves the yoke of Christ in our bodies. We do that according to the will of the Father and His gladness. We are then led by the Spirit of God as children of God. The Father will then accept the sacrifice of our fasting and bestow upon us what an eye has not seen.

Contemplating on the gospel readings each day of the lent is nourishments for the soul to fulfillment. Then the inner parts of a person are filled by the words and verses of the gospel. By fasting a person ceases from seeking the food which perishes and starts diligently seeking the food which endures to everlasting life.

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