

HOMILY AT ST. MATTHEW ORTHODOX CHURCH

JULY 31, 2022

“THE BEATITUDES, PART 5: BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL--- MATTHEW 5:7”

The great modern saint, St. Paisios, (who fell asleep in Christ in the 1990s), one day was in the woods not far from his isolated little hut. He was deep in prayer when he saw a man skulking around his hut. It was obvious he was going to enter it, most likely to rob whatever he could find. Paisios decided to quickly simplify the situation and ran over to the hut and opened the door for the man, saying, “Welcome! Please take anything you like!” And so the robber rummaged around. There wasn’t much to take as the holy man lived in such poverty. All he came up with was a bit of simple food. Paisios said it was a gift to him and blessed him as he ran away.

A couple of days later that man returned. He was carrying a box of food! He told Paisios that when he was stealing his belongings, he realized that as poor as he thought *he* was, that Paisios was even poorer. And so he was bringing food to help the Saint out! (Elder Paisios of Mt. Athos, Heiromonk Isaac, Holy Monastery of St. Arsenius, 2009, p. 177)

St. Paisios showed mercy to the robber----and the robber then showed mercy to the Saint!

When we are merciful to someone, it helps that person. But it helps us, too. We learn this in our Lord’s words in the 5th Beatitude—” Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.”

As you know, for several weeks this summer I am not, like usual, preaching on the assigned scripture lessons, but instead going through the Beatitudes Sunday by Sunday---in the version given to us in the gospel of St. Matthew. Today we are up to #5. Hear it again from Matthew 5:7---“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.”

How can we be merciful people so that we can obtain mercy? The Saints focus on two main ways. We’ll just glance at one way because not long ago I preached a sermon about it. And then we’ll look a bit more deeply at the second way.

The first way to be merciful is to help the needy, to give alms to the poor. The Greek word, “eleemosyne” means both mercy and alms, making the

connection very obvious. We show mercy by giving alms to the poor.

So if we wish God to be merciful to us, we must be merciful to the poor and to the beggars. St. Augustine put it this way 1600 years ago---“You hear the voice of a beggar---but before God you *yourself* are a beggar. Someone is begging *you* for mercy while you *yourself* are begging *God* for mercy. As you treat *your* beggar, so will God treat *His* beggar---you!” (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, Volume 1A, Matthew 1-13, Intervarsity Press, p 85)

A simple truth expressed by St. Augustine-----Do you want God to have mercy on you when you beg for it? Then have mercy on the beggar on the freeway ramp when he is begging help from you!

Moving on to the second way to be merciful.....Forgive those who have hurt you, insulted you, upset you. Have mercy on them.

On Judgement Day, our only hope is that God will have mercy on us. But modern writer Suzanne de Dietrich asks---can we expect Him to show mercy on us if we have not shown mercy to others? (Layman's Bible Commentary, Vol. 16, Matthew, John Knox Press, 1963, p. 29)

If we are not merciful, we won't receive mercy. Jesus Christ is crystal clear about this in the chapter right after the Beatitudes, in Matthew 6: 14-15. Hear the words of the Lord---“For if you forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”

No gray area in the Lord's words there-----It's plain and clear as can be! Forgive others and get forgiven. Or don't forgive others and don't get forgiven. If we don't forgive, it sounds like Judgement Day for us is going to be a tough, long day!

For it is by forgiving others that it becomes possible for us to receive the forgiveness that God is pouring down upon us. As the 5th Beatitude says---“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.”

This 5th Beatitude gives us a good opportunity for some self-examination. Who am I upset with? Who has hurt me, offended me, angered me? Once I figure out who, then I can start working, with God's help, towards forgiving them.....so that I can be forgiven by God.

That person that has hurt you is your opportunity to receive God's mercy. They, by treating you badly, have given you someone to forgive---themselves! And so that means they are helping you to yourself obtain mercy and forgiveness from God. Thank God for them and forgive.

It's true that sometimes we prefer to stay angry and upset, maybe even to seek some revenge. Revenge can, in the moment, seem enjoyable!

There's an old story about a truck driver pulling into a truck stop for lunch. He sat at the counter and ate his meal. He wasn't the stereotypical big, tough-looking trucker----just a little man, very mild in appearance. While he was eating, two very tough-looking Hell's Angels motorcyclists walked in. They sat not far from the truck driver and began to make fun of him, saying loudly to each other---"Boy, what a wimp that fellow is! I bet he couldn't fight his way out of a paper bag." Then they escalated to walking over by him and calling him "sissy", etc. Then they started to push him some. Finally, they picked up his plate of food and threw it to the floor, figuring that would get the man to attack them and then they would beat him up. But the truck driver just calmly got up, paid his bill, and walked out to his truck.

The Hell's Angels were congratulating each other on how they made a fool of the trucker. Then they bragged to the waitress----"That fellow sure wasn't much of a man!" The waitress, looking out the window at the parking lot, said, "And he's not much of a driver either....he just drove over both of your motorcycles on his way out of the parking lot!" ("Our Daily Bread", 2/28/90)

Of course, we can't help admire what the trucker did! And I bet he enjoyed his revenge that day. But....I imagine Judgement Day wasn't quite so enjoyable for him!

Each of us will stand before God to be judged after this life. Twice, actually! In our own particular individual judgement when we die....and then on the final Day when all who have lived will appear before the throne of God to be judged. You may remember that in our services we often call it "the dread judgement seat of Christ."

How can we prepare for that day? The Lord told us one way plain and simple in the 5th Beatitude. Show mercy to receive mercy. Forgive in order to be forgiven.

We should prepare for Judgement Day now by living out what Christ told us in the 5th Beatitude---"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

