

The Gold Rule (Mat 18:21-35).

* This Sunday can be considered a special one among the ordinary Sundays of Ordinary Time for two reasons. It was set aside for a celebration of the Festival of the Holy Cross, and for a commemoration of the terrorist attacks that is remembered over 10 years. With regard to the commemorative feast of the Holy Cross, it reminds us of the crucifixion the Son of God who died for our sins, he paid off the enormous cost for the transgressions of the entire world. And with reference to the commemoration of 9/11 attacks, it recalls the act of the worldwide hostility against the U.S. Besides, it still is not paid off completely.

* When I was looking for an idea of how to tie both events together, the help came through the President of our Synod Matthew Harrison who recently sent his circular under the title *A Hopeful Lamentation on the 10th Anniversary of 9/11*. The letter began with the picture of the iron cross-posted on the concrete pedestal in the heart of Manhattan. Then, it produced a considerable effect on me, and I exclaimed, *Here it is!*

* I believe, all of you have seen that rust-colored cross behind the multistory buildings. We even have its picture in our church; it is on a wall behind the copy machine. Besides, from the left side there is the aged crucifixion as well. Thinking of the symbolism with respect to both crosses, it seems to me that the cross in Manhattan stands as a symbol of the national lamentation over the thousands of victims who were buried under the enormous debris of the Trade Center. And if speaking strictly, this symbol is not only over them but also over all the victims who suffered death from the hands of the terrorists. The next significance of the iron cross refers to the passion for revenge against the global terrorism, as well it symbolizes our hope for a better future for the U.S. Therefore, after careful searching for the significance of the celebrated events, we found that they have at least one thing in common, that is a Cross! The act of setting up the relic cross on the place of the mass destruction in New York proves the central idea that, despite the universal secularization, it is still impossible to cut the Christological mystery out of context and out of the hearts of those Americans who entrust their lives to Jesus.

* Now let's sit up and take notice from (Mat 18:21-35), the gospel assigned for today. It narrates the Parable of the Unforgiving Slave. The lesson begins with Peter's remark, *"Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?"* The Lord surprised all his disciples by saying that they have to forgive their penitent brother or sister seventy times seven, (vv. 21,23). Jesus hyperbolized Peter's thought intentionally; by such an expression, he taught Peter about unconditional mercy over judgment. Then, he told a parable.

* Once upon a time there was a King who decided to settle accounts with his servants. It came to light to everybody that one's debt was as large as 375 tons of silver. It again proves the great generosity of the King.

Moreover, knowing that it was impossible for that servant to pay back, the King had pity on him and mercifully forgave all his debt. Unfortunately, when *the lucky devil* went out, he found a man who owed him one hundred silver coins. He seized him and, treating him harshly, demanded his money back. In a similar way the poor fellow pleaded to his creditor to wait for awhile until he would pay his debt in full. However, unlike the merciful and generous King, *the lucky devil* refused to forgive his fellow's debt, and put him in prison! That is a shame, said friends, and they reported the case to their Master. "*You wicked servant!*", exclaimed the King when the former debtor was brought to the court. *Why didn't you show mercy to your fellow servant as I had mercy on you?* And in anger, the Master handed the servant over to the prison until he paid everything back. Then Jesus added, "*So will my heavenly Father do with you, unless you sincerely forgive your brothers and sisters,*" (vv.34-35).

* If speaking from reality, we are all witnesses of God's merciful heart who constantly forgives our sins when we cry to him, *O Lord, have mercy to me, a sinner!* At the same time, *we do not even give others enough breathing space*, said the Christian Community Bible, (p. 1367). Sometime we might behave like the wicked servant from the parable, (see Mt 5:43). From the whole context we learned the important truth that the Father forgives our debts/sins if we follow His Son in word and deeds. However, God won't forgive those servants who neglect the teaching of forgiveness. Jesus says, *For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.* (Mat 6:14-15). And what does it mean for a person to not be forgiven???

* Some of us may have asked questions, *Why does God let bad things happen to me? Or, What did I do to deserve all this trouble?* Reflecting on these questions and the teaching of *the Parable*, some of us may think that their physical sufferings are the result of their sins against someone or their refusal to forgive someone else. In this case, the wise Christians will look for an opportunity to atone for their sins by words and deeds or to forgive others who sin against them. For instance, in the movie *A Man Called Peter*, the preacher's wife wrote letters to all the people she thought she might have offended during her lifetime. Now imagine that a certain person refused to forgive the pastor's wife after receiving her apology letter. In this instance, one person found life but other - condemnation. No doubt, the preacher's wife acted with double earnestness. Therefore, all Christians should remember the golden rule, If they don't forgive their penitent brother or sister from all their hearts, the Heavenly Father will not forgive them either.

* Please ask yourselves, what do I feel when my mind perceives the Holy Cross? Have I perceived that on this cross my sins were atoned by the Son of God? Then, think about this: If the Father didn't spare His only begotten Son but judged his flesh rather than ours; and for His Son's sake forgives our sins;

then how it is shameful if in our turn we don't wish to forgive another Christian for whom Jesus suffered on the cross. Next, when we perceive the Holy Cross, we should feel ourselves guilty before God and should be asking for His forgiveness for Christ's sake. And because the heart of our Father is so merciful and so generous, He forgives our astronomical debts when we cry, *O Lord have mercy to me a sinner*, (Luk 18:13). The forgiveness is to bring peace in our hearts and take out our anxiety. Here we give unending thanks to Jesus for his Cross for us. On the other hand, we should remember that the Father loves those who exercise mercy by following Jesus' example. The forgiveness of our debtors with all our hearts is the key of our forgiveness by the Father!

* As far as the important questions were posted and answered, we wish to come back to the discussion of the memorial cross in Manhattan with a purpose to highlight its Christological aspect. In fact, there is a considerable difference between the Holy and iron crosses, but both still symbolize judgment - God's and human. The tragic event of September 11 caused a profound impact, and not only on our society. Please notice, a number of its victims is growing constantly; and nobody knows where it will end. Isn't it true that a human judgment washes its hands of asking forgiveness, judges without mercy, and leaves without hope for the better? In contrast to this, today we recall God's great mercy without end for all who fear and love Him.

Beloved, may God's blessing come to us with the forgiveness of our trespasses,
forasmuch we forgive those who trespass against us.

† Amen †

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