



60<sup>th</sup> Year September 30, 2012 Pamphlet # 40 (3096)

## LOVE FOR ENEMIES

### **Exhortation to the apostles**

Today's Gospel passage comes from a speech which the Lord made in a plain place, before a large multitude of people. St. Theophylactos, the Archbishop of Bulgaria, commenting on the words of this passage observes that the Lord is addressing them to His disciples. Because they would be sent to preach and it was expected that many persecutors and enemies of theirs would appear, there was the danger that the apostles, becoming frustrated from the persecution and wishing to defend themselves to those who would grieve them, would become silent and cease teaching. In this way however, the sun of the Gospel would be put out.

So for this reason, the Lord, preparing them, advises them to not take revenge on their enemies, but to forbear all the afflictions with much bravery, even if quite a few of them are cursing them and behaving in an impious manner towards them. Then, so that the apostles would not be able to say that it is impossible to keep such a commandment, in other words, to love their enemies, He convinces them both from the innate law, as well is from the reward which awaits them. Specifically, first He reminds them of the natural law which all people have traced inside them and which commands that we behave to others as we would want them to behave toward us. Subsequently He underlines that with love towards enemies, man is granted to resemble God and to become his son.

### **The criterion of truth**

The Lord reveals the essential mark of the life of a true Christian, which makes him different from all those who either are in false religions or are slaves of sin. This is selfless love, without ulterior motives, which embraces in it, all people, and especially those called "enemies". This means that in other religious dogmas, love for enemies either does not exist at all as a teaching or is completely unachievable.

So for this reason Saint Silouan the Athonite, who was living through the Holy Spirit, the grace of this love, was confessing and proclaiming that the fact that in the Orthodox Church the commandment of love for enemies is taught and implemented, comprises a clear proof that only in

her, the truth and eternal life exists. Aside from this love, there is no clearer criterion, for us to ascertain if someone is in the truth or not. So for this reason also, the Lord in reference to those deceived and the heretics says that we can distinguish them from their fruits. Because really, pure and unadulterated love is absent from their life, the marks of which the Gospel and the saints of the Church describe to us.

### **Anatomy of the commandment “love your enemies”**

The Blessed elder Sophrony Sacharov notes that the saying “love your enemies” is that fire which the Lord brought down to earth with His coming (Luke 12:49), that uncreated light, which illumined the apostles on Tabor, those fiery tongues, with which the Holy Spirit descended on the apostles in the upper room of Zion. It is the Kingdom of God within us, “having come in power”, and furthermore it is the completion of our likening with God. Therefore, capable of loving enemies is only he who, according to the word of Christ, saw the kingdom of God coming “in power”. He who loses his soul, following Christ.

The incarnation of the Only Begotten Son of God itself and all His earthly life comprises love for enemies. So for this reason also, whoever reaches the point of living the charismatic condition of unflinching love for enemies, becomes similar to Christ, and ends up a son of the Most High God the Father by grace. In other words, in the commandment of love for enemies, the Lord reveals to us the image of man, as he exists in the creative mind of God, preeternally.

### **A mistaken viewpoint**

Many people, not only unbelievers, but even among those who confess themselves to be Christian, fear to act according to the command of love for enemies. They suppose that this is beneficial only for the enemies. They think that the enemies will be benefited by their “weakness” and will respond to love with hate and forcefulness, and then evil will triumph. The thought concerning “weakness” of Christianity is completely mistaken. The Saints possess quite a bit of strength, in order to prevail upon people, but they proceed on the opposite path: they enslave themselves to their brother and thus obtain for themselves such love, which in its essence is incorrupt. On this path they achieve victory, which remains unto the ages, whereas the victory which is obtained through violence never is firm, and comprises rather a reproach of humanity rather than its glory.

Let us also proceed on this path of love, which the Lord traversed as “a forerunner for our sake”, so that we could become similar to Him and in our person the, in the image and in the likeness, could be restored.

Archim. P. K.