



The rite of the mutual forgiveness is far from being just a ritual. It can be, and often is a profoundly effective event, that changes the lives of those, who participate in it.
Kallistos of Diokleia

Forgiveness Sunday

Today is the last Sunday before Great Lent begins. Ash Wednesday will be observed in many Western churches this week. The first full day of Great Lent in the Eastern Orthodox Church will be tomorrow. But this evening, all over the world, Orthodox Christians will seek forgiveness and reconciliation from one another at Forgiveness Sunday Vespers.

The early Church took seriously Christ's command in Matthew 5:23, "23 So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift." (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, 2001) People who had offenses and hurts against others were not even allowed into the building until they were reconciled!

"On the Lord's Day, when you have been gathered together, break bread and celebrate the Eucharist. But first confess your sins, so that your offering may be pure. If anyone has a quarrel with his neighbor, that person should not join you until he has been reconciled. Your sacrifice must not be defiled. In this regard, the Lord has said: In every place and time offer Me a pure sacrifice. I am a great king, says the Lord, and My Name is great among the nations." (The Didache on the Eucharist , 2016)

As we begin Lent this year, may we search out our hearts and ask the Holy Spirit to bring to our remembrance those who have offended us, and those whom we may have offended. May we ask the Lord to help us to rid our hearts of the disease of un-forgiveness that can steal our very salvation. Jesus Himself said in Matthew 6:14-15, " 14 For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, 15 but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, 2001) If, while we examine ourselves, we find that there is someone whom we have offended, let us ask the Lord to grant us an opportunity to seek that person's forgiveness.

At Forgiveness Sunday Vespers, we as a church community will endeavor to enter Great Lent fully reconciled to one another, so that our sacrifices of prayer, worship, fasting and almsgiving will not be defiled. All are welcome to come and begin Great Lent in the proper spirit of reconciliation this evening at 6:00 pm !