



DIAKONIA

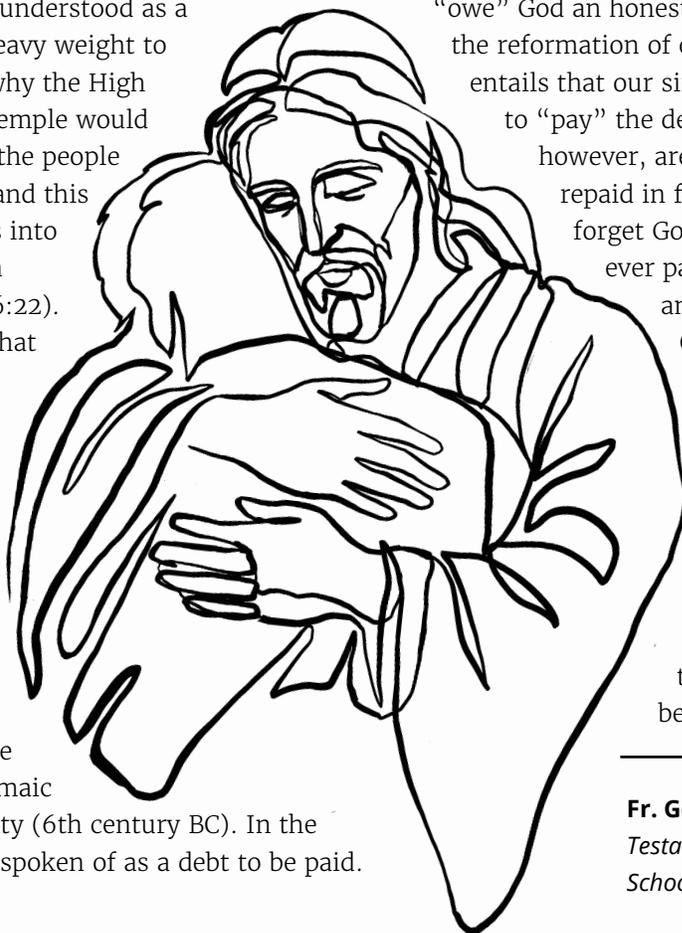
A National Ministry of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America

REFLECTIONS FROM TODAY'S READING - *Matthew 6:14-21*

Forgiveness Comes From Forgiving

Fr. George Parsenios

Today's Gospel passage opens with a simple but important message: if we wish to be forgiven, we must forgive. The forgiveness of our sins by God depends on the forgiveness we give to others. This is a remarkable teaching. To understand it, let us look for a moment at the various ways that sin is understood in the Bible. Two concepts of sin dominated in the Old Testament. Sin was first understood as a burden to be carried, a heavy weight to be borne. This explains why the High Priest in the Jerusalem Temple would ritually place the sins of the people onto the head of a goat, and this goat would carry the sins into the desert every year as a "scapegoat" (Leviticus 16:22). Sin was a heavy burden that had to be lifted from the shoulders of the people. Alongside this idea of sin as a burden was the notion of sin as a stain to be cleansed. Which is why Psalm 50:7 says, "Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." An entirely new sense of sin developed when the Jews began speaking Aramaic in the Babylonian Captivity (6th century BC). In the Aramaic language, sin is spoken of as a debt to be paid.



In keeping with this notion of sin, Jesus refers to our transgressions as debts (*ta opheilimata*) in the Lord's Prayer. And he refers to the people who sin against us as debtors (*tois opheiletais*). The image of sin as a debt to be paid is a powerful one. When we injure the people around us, we "owe" them an apology or some form of restitution. When we commit sins before God, we "owe" God an honest confession of our errors and the reformation of our life. The idea of sin as a debt entails that our sins require some form of action to "pay" the debt. Our errors and mistakes, however, are far too numerous to ever be repaid in full. We continually ignore and forget God and his will. How can we ever pay the debt we owe him? Jesus answers this dilemma in today's Gospel: we must forgive others. If we are forgiving—truly and sincerely forgiving—then we will be forgiven. When we erase the debt of others against us, we embrace our salvation in Christ and he erases the full invoice of our debts before God. Let us forgive, therefore, in order that we might be forgiven.

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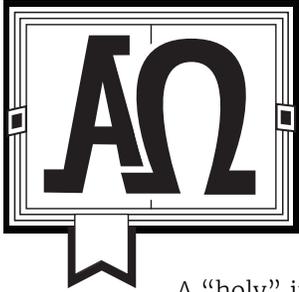
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FROM THE ORIGINAL GREEK: *Agios* (ἅγιος) What is “Holy?”

Fr. George Parsenios



The meaning of the term “holy” might seem obvious, but the word “holy” (*agios* in Greek; *qodesh* in Hebrew) is more nuanced than we assume. The opposite of holy, for example, is not “sinful.” The opposite of holy is “common” or “everyday.”

A “holy” item is set apart for God and can only be used for divine purposes.

In the Jerusalem Temple, the Jews guarded “holy” money that was specially designated for the upkeep of God’s Temple. These funds could not be spent for any “common” purpose. Ancient sources report that when Pontius Pilate took the Temple money to repair

public buildings in Jerusalem, the Jews rioted. The holy money had been misused. Orthodox Christian altars also contain “holy” items set apart for God. The communion chalice is not for everyday drinking, and the communion spoon is not for casual meals. These things are holy, dedicated to the worship of God. In the same way, we ourselves are called to be holy, to transcend common human motivations. When insulted, we are not enraged, but merciful. When tempted, we rise above the temptation. We think of others instead of focusing solely on our own comfort. To do these things is to be holy, to be sanctified. Indeed, the very Greek word for saint is the word *agios* a holy one. A saint is “holy” (*agios*) because his or her life is utterly devoted to God and “set apart” for God’s purposes.

THIS WEEK’S LOOK AT CHURCH HISTORY

Athenagoras Cavadas



A great influence in the early years of our Archdiocese was Athenagoras Cavadas. He was born in Kerkyra, and received his theological education in Athens. Ordained to the priesthood in 1910, he served as the Vice-Rector of the Rizarion Seminary in Athens until 1918, when he received a scholarship to continue his studies at Oxford.

In 1921, he was invited to serve the Church in America. After serving several parishes, he was appointed Chancellor of the Archdiocese in 1931.

In 1937, he was appointed Dean of Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology located then in Pomfret, Connecticut. In 1938, Fr. Athenagoras was consecrated Bishop of Boston and served as an auxiliary bishop of the Archdiocese. While at the theological school, he labored tirelessly raising funds and developing a rich program that would prepare clergy and laity to serve our Archdiocese. Ten years later, the campus of Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology was moved to its current location in Brookline, Massachusetts. The vision, determination, and leadership of Bishop Athenagoras assured that our seminary would survive those critical first years and well into the future.

PHOTO SOURCE: *Photo Courtesy of HCHC*



FORGIVENESS SUNDAY

Opening the Heart for Great Lent

Forgiveness Sunday, also known as Cheesefare Sunday, is the final step in the Church's three week journey of preparation before Great Lent. Throughout this pre Lenten period known as the Triodion, the hymns and readings guide us toward repentance, humility, and renewal. On this final Sunday before Clean Monday, which is the first day of Great Lent, the Church places before us two important themes: the exile of Adam and Eve from Paradise and the command of Christ to forgive one another. Together, they light our path for the coming forty days of fasting and spiritual focus.

The expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden is more than historical; it is personal. We stand with them before the gates of Paradise, aware of how our choices, passions, and forgetfulness have separated us from the life we were created to enjoy. Yet we find hope in this season of Great Lent in which Jesus invites us to journey back to Him through repentance, prayer, and renewal of our faith.

Biblical Message of Forgiveness

Before we begin our Lenten journey, the Church teaches that true repentance cannot begin without forgiveness. In the Gospel reading today (Matthew 6:14–21), Jesus makes it clear: "If you forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you." Forgiveness Sunday reminds us that we cannot seek God's mercy if we don't show mercy to those around us.

Forgiveness is more than letting go of our grievances. Forgiveness sets us free, breaking the chains of resentment that bind our heart. Forgiveness can heal division and calm anger. It is the first step in restoring the image of Jesus Christ in ourselves and in others. When we forgive, we invite the Kingdom of God into our life.

As we stand on the threshold of Great Lent, Forgiveness Sunday reminds us that we were never meant to make this journey alone. We draw closer to God by opening our hearts to one another. Each act of forgiveness becomes a step toward Him, loosening the burdens we carry. When we forgive, even in small and imperfect ways, a door opens within us—the very gate of Paradise. Through that open gate, the healing peace of Jesus Christ begin to shine in us and in the world around us.

Personal Challenge as We Begin Great Lent: Prayer

For Orthodox Christians, the aim of prayer is to enter into conversation with God. Prayer is sometimes referred to as dialogue with God. Often it is a waiting on God in silence. In this dialogue with God, we praise Him and thank Him. We ask Him for what we need. Our mind and our heart are opened to Him. Prayer is not only repeating words; it is trust in God that he hears and guides us to spiritual growth and development.

Commit to praying the prayer of Saint Ephraim the Syrian each day of Great Lent:

O Lord and Master of my life, take from me the spirit of sloth, despair, lust for power, and idle talk.

But give rather the spirit of chastity, humility, patience, and love to Your servant.

*Yea, O Lord and King, grant me to see my own transgressions, and not to judge my brother,
for blessed are You, unto ages of ages. Amen.*



Just For Kids!

(...and the young at heart)

Today is Forgiveness Sunday

Jesus
teaches
me to
f♥rgive.

Be kind,
and forgive one
another.

COLOR ME!