



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

PARISH OF THE ANNUNCIATION OF OUR LADY, “EVANGELISMOS”

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SUNDAY 1 OCTOBER 2017 – ‘LOVE YOUR ENEMIES’

EPISTLE The Reading is from The Acts of the Apostles

[9:10-19]

Now there was a certain disciple at Damascus named Ananias; and to him the Lord said in a vision, “Ananias.” And he said, “Here I am Lord.” So the Lord said to him, “Arise and go to the street called Straight, and inquire at the house of Judas for *one* called Saul of Tarsus, for behold, he is praying. And in a vision he has seen a man named Ananias coming in and putting *his* hand on him, so that he might receive his sight.” Then Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much harm he has done to Your saints in Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on Your name.” But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake.” And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive

your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Immediately there fell from his eyes *something* like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he arose and was baptized. So when he had received food, he was strengthened. Then Saul spent some days with the disciples at Damascus.

EXPLANATION:

Saul was a great persecutor of the early Jewish Christians. He was a Roman citizen who studied under Gamaliel who was a famous and well respected Rabbi renowned for his knowledge of Jewish religious law and traditions. Saul acquired great zeal for Judaism and was appointed prosecutor of Jewish Christians. Since Christianity is called **the Way** (John 14:6), to persecute the Church is to persecute Christ Himself. On his way to Damascus to arrest Ananias, a devout Christian leader, Jesus appeared to him in a bright light that blinded Saul for three days. And the Lord instructed him to go to Damascus and in a vision he saw a man named Ananias putting his hand on him so that he might receive his sight. Saul became the **chosen vessel** of God's work and became known as Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles. **(9:15)** Remarkably, Ananias calls this former persecutor of Christians **brother**, a sign that Saul had already believed in Christ. To enter into the fullness of Christ, he is **baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit. (9:17-18)** And immediately in the synagogues he preached Jesus, that He is the Son of God. He was not ashamed of the change, nor was he afraid. The very zeal he had for Judaism was now more glorious in his zeal for Christianity. Ananias validates Paul's Damascus experience as coming from God. Its purpose is fourfold:

- 1) Paul is to know God's will,
- 2) He is to see the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God,
- 3) He is to hear the voice of Christ's mouth, and
- 4) He is to be His witness to all men. **(Acts 22:14-15)**

GOSPEL **The Reading is from St Luke [6:31-36]**

And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise. But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.

EXPLANATION:

The apostles were about to be sent out to preach and many persecutors and plotters awaited them. If they became fearful of persecution and did not boldly preach Christ's teachings, the radiant sun of the Gospel would not have spread throughout the world. In anticipation of this, Jesus exhorts the apostles not to give way to defensive measures against their enemies, but instead to bravely endure all things, even insults and murderous plots. This is what He himself did on the Cross. To prove to the apostles that this commandment **to love one's enemies** is possible to keep, Jesus says, "if you want your enemies to be hard, unfeeling and angry towards you, then be the same yourself to them. But if you want them to be kind

and compassionate toward you, then you also must show kindness and forgiveness and not remember past wrongs. **(6:31-33)** Then He adds another compelling reason to keep this commandment; “if you only love those who love you, then you are no better than sinners, who do the same. But if you love those who do evil to you, you are like God, “Who is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. “Who sends rain on the just and the unjust?” Which do you desire, to be like sinners or to be like God? Jesus asks us to go beyond the call of duty in forgiveness. Those who belong to the realm of God know that forgiveness has no limits – “Not seven times, but seventy times seven”. Jesus went all the way to the Cross for us. **(6:34-35)** How far are we willing to go for Christ in forgiveness and love for others? “Love” means to love that which is unlovable, otherwise it is no virtue at all. But how is it possible to love someone who dislikes you, insults you and wants to harm you? It is not possible unless one first loves God with his whole being. By doing good to your enemies you remove the bitterness from their hearts. Pray for them. No person can pray for another and still hate him. Seek to find in them those good qualities which undoubtedly exist in every man. Develop the capacity to forgive. Only the injured person can pour out the warm waters of forgiveness. **“Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.” (6:36)** However wise, learned, noble a man may be, if he does not love his enemies, that is, love his fellow-beings, he has not attained to God, whereas a man who carries this love in his heart, then “he dwelleth in God, and God in him.” (John 6:56) Divine love does not dwell in him who does not love his enemies.