



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

PARISH OF THE ANNUNCIATION OF OUR LADY, “EVANGELISMOS”

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SUNDAY 4 OCTOBER 2020 – ‘LOVE YOUR ENEMIES’

EPISTLE: **The Reading is from St Paul’s Second Letter to the Corinthians [6:16-18; 7:1]** And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” Therefore “Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.” Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

EXPLANATION: The Spirit of God dwells in those who are baptised and chrismated and follow a lifestyle that demonstrates faith that Christ is Lord and Saviour. They become God’s temple – in which holiness pervades to the degree they allow. No one can be dedicated to both God and idols (false gods). God demands our total allegiance for our own good – our salvation. At that time when Paul wrote this Epistle Corinth was a pagan city. The lives of the Corinthians revolved around idol worship. Those who became Christians were expected to make an

absolute break with that type of life because worship belongs only to the Creator. The setting is different in our day, but Paul's advice still applies. We are given life to have the opportunity to find God and grow in union with Him. Thus we were created with a space in our hearts that aches until it is filled by His presence. If something other than God becomes the most important element in our lives, be it career, money, power, fame, a person, or even sports or other forms of recreation, it takes God's rightful place. It becomes to us a false god – an idol – and we become idol worshippers. Idol worshippers have nothing in common with those who worship God, nor do they ever find true peace, because they misuse the gift of life. It is crucial that we place God on His throne in our hearts and lives so all other elements will take their proper place. (6:16) Paul quotes the Old Testament (Isaiah 52:11), God's word to the Hebrews to be His people, which was different from the Gentiles who were considered unclean according to the Law of Moses. He tells the early Christians that they too must be set apart from prevalent pagan influences and activity. They are to become imitators of God, just as young children imitate their parents and thereby learn and grow. We must separate ourselves from the ungodly in our society, as far as our thoughts and conduct. Yet at the same time we are called upon to love even our enemies, to be good examples to all, and to welcome any sincere seeker to the love of the Gospel. This delicate balance is difficult, but "with God all things are possible" (Matt 19:26). Above all, we must not allow anything in our lives to come between us and God, or anything that has the possibility of drawing us away from God. If we put Him first in all we do, He will claim us as His children, and we will become heirs to His Kingdom forever. (6:17-18) Therefore we must cleanse ourselves of all filthiness of the flesh and spirit and continue our efforts to be Christ like in all.

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.