

Reflection: Humility, Repentance, Forgiveness, Compassion and Justice: Central Virtues for our Journey with Christ

What follows is a series of quotations from Scripture, Patristic authors, and other Orthodox Christian writers about humility, repentance, forgiveness, compassion, and being just: central virtues for our journey with Christ in Great Lent to Holy Week and Pascha

† † † ***Humility:*** At that time the disciples came to Jesus and said, “Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” And He called a child to Himself and set him among them, and said, “Truly I say to you, unless you change and become like children, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. So, whoever will humble himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. (Matt 18:1-6)

† † ***Humility*** is poverty of spirit and meekness. Humility inspires an attitude of listening and of seeking out those who can give good counsel. Humility welcomes correction. A humble person is not proud or arrogant. Humility is not a denial of my value as a human being but rather seeing myself in relationship to God. Humility results from being in a state of gratitude rather than envy, resentment, or bitterness. (Jim Forest, *Confession: Doorway to Forgiveness*)”

† † ***Complete trust in God*** – that’s holy humility. Complete obedience to God, without protest, without reaction, even when some things seem difficult and unreasonable. Abandonment to the hands of God. The words we repeat during the Divine Liturgy say it all: ‘Let us commend our whole life to Christ our God.’ (Elder Porphyrios, *Wounded by Love*)

† † † ***Repentance:*** “Now, therefore,” says the Lord, “Turn to Me with all your heart, With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.” So, rend your heart, and not your garments; Return to the Lord your God, For He is gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, and of great kindness; And He relents from doing harm.” (Joel 2:12-13)

† † ***To repent*** is not to look downwards at my own shortcomings, but upwards at God’s Love. It is not to look backwards with self-reproach but forward with trustfulness. It is to see not what I have failed to be, but what by the Grace of Christ I might yet become. (Saint John Climacus)

† † ***There is nothing higher than what is called repentance and confession.*** This sacrament is the offering of God’s love to mankind. In this perfect way a person is freed of evil. We go and confess and we sense our reconciliation with God; joy enters us and guilt departs. (St Porphyrios)

† † † ***Forgiveness:*** “When you stand and pray, forgive anything you have against anyone, so that your Father in heaven will forgive the wrongs you have done” (Mk. 11:25). From the Lord’s Prayer: “Forgive us our trespasses/debts, as we forgive those who trespass against us/our debtors” (Mt. 6:12).

† † ***Absolutely nothing will help us if we are not lenient toward the weaknesses of others and forgive them.*** For how can we hope that God will forgive us if we do not forgive others? (*Saint Nikolai Velimirovich*)

† † ***Very often, when I reflect on the manner of forgiving, I discover that when I forgive, I view myself to be at the center of things: it is I who forgive, for it is me who has been wounded. When I forgive, it is always me that is praised. Here it would be good to recall the parable of Christ about the beam and the mote: "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? (Lk 6:41)." (Fr Boris Bobrinskoy) [That is, don't puff yourself up in arrogance when you practice forgiveness. Fr John]***

† † † ***Compassion and Justice:*** Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom; give ear to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah: “To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?” says the Lord. “I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed cattle. ...When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood. Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow.” (Is 1:10-11, 15-17; First Monday in Great Lent)

† † ***While fasting with the body, brothers and sisters, let us also fast in spirit. Let us loose every bond of iniquity. Let us undo the knots of every contract made by violence. Let us tear up all unjust agreements. Let us give bread to the hungry and welcome to our house the poor who have no roof to cover them, that we may receive great mercy from Christ our God. (First Week of Lent, Wednesday, Vespers)***

† † ***Rich and lacking compassion, I have despised and cast out faith in your commandments before the gates, O Lover of mankind. But as merciful and a lover of compassion raise me up at once in compassion as you raised up your friend Lazarus, who was four days dead. (Fifth Sunday of Great Lent (St Mary of Egypt), Matins)***