

October 2,  
2011

# Sunday Sermon

Fr Ambrose Young  
*Entrance of the Theotokos Skete*



## **GOSPEL OF PERFECT CHARITY**

Luke 6:31-36

This morning's Gospel reading is called, for good reason, "The Gospel of Perfect Charity." By charity is not meant necessarily only the giving of money to good causes and the needy, good and important in itself but "charity" is a word with many rich meanings, and all of them are implied in this morning's Gospel.

Two of these additional meanings are as follows: a benevolent goodwill toward or unselfish love of others, and a lenient or tolerant judgment of others. It can also mean generous and compassionate. Our word in English, "charity," comes directly from the Latin term *caritas*, which means literally love, affection, or esteem.

St. Nicolai Velimirovitch, writing about this Gospel account, reminds us that if "men were mindful every day of God's charity towards them, they would be charitable to one another." In other words, if God did not first love us, by creating us and sending His Son to save us, we would not be able to love anyone else OR God, for that matter. Love, in and of itself, is a divine attribute, planted in us by God. On the other hand, the attribute which belongs to the Devil is hatred, and it is *this* which Satan wishes to implant in us rather than love.

So charity, or love, is an active virtue, not a passive one. In other words, it's not an abstract idea, something "nice" to think about or talk about. It means activity, behavior. But charity as an active virtue is greater than earthly justice.

### **IT IMPLIES MERCY.**

Today's Gospel, therefore, speaks about "the highest form of charity: love for one's enemies." Of course this is the very hardest form of love or charity, but it is one to which we are all, without exception, called. Love for one's enemies is an "unnatural" form of love, for who can ever "feel" love for those who use them spitefully or cruelly? From this we learn that love rarely has anything to do with feelings. But it has much to do with behavior, with action. It means to be merciful towards our enemies, to not talk about them to others, to judge them lightly if at all, no matter what they have done. This is very difficult, but as Christ Himself

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tells us, it is not impossible, for since God loves everyone, *even our enemies*; how then is it possible that we cannot love—that is, be kindly toward--those whom God loves?!

St. Nicolai says, "If it is true that every man in this world has enemies, then this means that *you* are someone's enemy [too]...Therefore first dig out the root of enmity from your [own] heart...To the extent to which you have completely dug this evil root out from your heart, and cut down all the shoots that constantly spring up from it, to this extent will you find fewer enemies to count. If then you desire that people be your friends, you must first stop being an enemy to others and become their friend."

But St. Nicolai says that even this is not the main point of this morning's Gospel reading. He explains it simply: we must have, above all, *God* as our friend! Now, it is indeed laughable to think that we could ever become the "friends" of God, "by any sort of deed, even were this by the greatest love for our enemy...Were we to give away all that we have to the poor, fast every day of our lives and stand day and night in prayer like a candle to the end of time...were we to be spat on and trodden underfoot by the whole world...all this would be an infinitesimal price for those things" God has given us. Yet, even so, the Lord Jesus Christ told His followers—and through them, us—that they were his "friends."

## **So, HOW TO WE BECOME "FRIENDS" OF GOD?**

We do so by drawing as close to Him as we possibly can in this earthly life. And we do this by obeying the commandments, both those of the Old Testament and those which Christ gave us in the New Testament, and by obeying these commandments without reserve or condition, for the Lord Himself told us, "If you *love* Me you will obey my commandments."

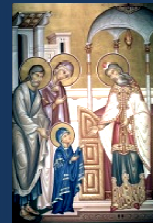
"*If you love Me...*" Remember, "charity" is a form or an expression of love. So what Jesus was saying here is, "If you wish to show charity towards Me you will obey my commandments."

Were Adam and Eve worthy, deserving, of the Garden of Eden? In no way. Paradise was given to them by God's pure love. How did they manage to remain in Eden until the Fall? Simply by obeying God, by obedience alone. Once they ceased to obey God, they fell out of fellowship, friendship with Him, and were expelled from the Garden.

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So *this* is what the Redeemer of our souls asks from us today: obedience to His commandments; faith and obedience. Nothing more, nothing less.

**AND THE CHIEF OF THESE IS LOVE—CHARITY, CARITAS.**

“As a sick man receives medicine from the doctor’s hand with faith and obedience—be the medicine sweet or bitter—so we, weakened by sin and darkened in mind, are bound to fulfill with faith and obedience all that the loving Physician of our souls and Lord of our life, Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God, commands us.” (St. Nicolai Velimirovitch)

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.