

What we should most observe is this, that whereas in each of the clauses [*of the Lord's Prayer*] He had made mention of the whole of virtue, and in this way had included also the forgetfulness of injuries (for so, that "His name be hallowed," is the exactness of a perfect conversation; and that "His will be done," declares the same thing again: and to be able to call God "Father," is the profession of a blameless life; in all which things had been comprehended also the duty of remitting our anger against them that have transgressed): still He was not satisfied with these, but meaning to signify how earnest He is in the matter, He sets it down also in particular, and after the prayer, He makes mention of no other commandment than this, saying thus:

"For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you."

So that the beginning is of us, and we ourselves have control over the judgment that is to be passed upon us. For in order that no one, even of the senseless, might have any complaint to make, either great or small, when brought to judgment; on thee, who art to give account, He causes the sentence to depend; and "in what way soever thou hast judged for thyself, in the same," saith He, "do I also judge thee." And if thou forgive thy fellow servant, thou shalt obtain the same favor from Me; though indeed the one be not equal to the other. For thou forgivest in thy need, but God, having need of none: thou, thy fellow slave; God, His slave: thou, liable to unnumbered charges; God, being without sin.

But yet even thus doth He show forth His loving-kindness towards man. Since He might indeed, even without this, forgive thee all thine offenses; but He wills thee hereby also to receive a benefit; affording thee on all sides innumerable occasions of gentleness and love to man, casting out what is brutish in thee, and quenching wrath, and in all ways cementing thee to him who is thine own member. For what canst thou have to say? that thou hast wrongfully endured some ill of thy neighbor? (For these only are trespasses, since if it be done with justice, the act is not a trespass.) But thou too art drawing near to receive forgiveness for such things, and for much greater.

And even before the forgiveness, thou hast received no small gift, in being taught to have a human soul, and in being trained to all gentleness. And here with a great reward shall also be laid up for thee elsewhere, even to be called to account for none of thine offenses. What sort of punishment then do we not deserve, when after having received the privilege, we betray our salvation? And how shall we claim to be heard in the rest of our matters, if we will not, in those which depend on us, spare our own selves?

St John Chrysostom,
Homily XIX on the Gospel of Saint Matthew, p. 136.

Pearls from the Holy Fathers

Cheese-fare Sunday

Forgiveness Sunday

Clean Week

February 16–22, 2009

