

## **Fourth Palm Sunday – Forgiveness**

*Delivered by Rev. Fr. Ghevond Ajamian  
St. Sarkis Armenian Church. Carrollton, TX  
June 17, 2018  
Gospel Reading: Matthew 12:38-45*

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In today's Gospel Reading, Christ mentions Jonah and how he spent three days in the belly of the whale, just like the Son of Man would spend three days in the belly of the earth. The story of Jonah and the whale is a familiar one, which many of us have heard, but in case we haven't, it goes like this.

In the Old Testament, God called to Jonah one day and told him to go preach to Nineveh repentance, because the people were very wicked and He wanted them to change. However, at the time, Nineveh was one of Israel's greatest enemies and Jonah hated them, similar to how we may very Turks or Azeris in the Armenian community, and Jonah wanted nothing to do with preaching to them.

Jonah then decided to run away from God, and his responsibility, by getting on a ship and sailing in the opposite direction of Nineveh, headed to Tarsish. God sent a great storm upon the ship and the sailors figured out that Jonah was to blame for the storm, so they threw him overboard. As soon as they tossed Jonah in the water, the storm stopped and God sent a whale to swallow Jonah and to save him from drowning. While in the belly of the whale, Jonah prayed to God for help, repented, and praised God. For three days Jonah sat in the belly of the whale and on the third day God had the whale spit Jonah onto the shores of Nineveh.

This is usually where the story ends, but there is actually more to this story. The Bible goes on to say that Jonah preached to Nineveh and warned them to repent before the city is destroyed in 40 days. The people believed Jonah, turned from their wickedness, and God had mercy on them. Jonah now became angry and bitter because God did not destroy the Ninevites whom Jonah hated. In fact Jonah, knowing that God is loving, compassionate and forgiving, said to God, "I knew you would do this, that is why I ran away".

Jonah then went to the east of the city to see what would come of them and he sat in the very hot sun. God provided him with a vine that gave him shade and Jonah was very grateful for that. The next day, God sent a worm to eat the vine and when Jonah sat again and the hot sun became unbearable, he complained, felt bad for the plant complaining and even wanted to die. God called out to Jonah and scolded him for being so concerned and worried about just a plant and said, "You feel sorry for the plant, but feel nothing for the 120,000 souls who live in spiritual darkness in Nineveh" – and this is where the story ends.

Many people allow jealousy, pride and hatred to prevent them from seeing the spiritual needs of others, especially when those in need are viewed as enemies. Many of us get mad when we see God's mercy and love upon our enemies. How many of us feel some sort of resentment when we hear that Turkey is prospering or good things happen to Turkey? Jealousy, pride and hatred eat away at us until we too become spiritually dark, just like the worm which ate away and killed Jonah's vine.

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To save us from spiritual decay and numbness to the needs of others, we have the gift of forgiveness, which is not used often enough. Our Heavenly Father uses this gift on all of us and expects us to do the same to others, even our enemies. Christ reminds us, saying, “love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who persecute you and despitefully use you, for by doing so, you may become children of your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:44-45).

In order to love, bless, do good and pray for these people, we must first forgive. I know there will be those who say, they hurt me; they said bad things about me, they injured my family, they did this and/or that – but don’t we do the same thing every day against God and He still forgives us? Are we not less worthy of forgiveness because we knowingly go against Him and yet we still receive it?

In the very prayer which Christ taught His disciples how to pray, and in turn taught us, He says, “forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us”. This means our forgiveness is directly connected to our ability to forgive. If we do not forgive, we will not be forgiveness. It is as simple and difficult as that.

So, on this Father’s Day, when we remember our fathers and all they provided, taught and gave us, let us also remember our Heavenly Father and how He too gives us love, compassion and forgiveness. And just as many of us end up acting like our parents, as much as we try not to, let us act like our Heavenly Father who IS love, compassion and forgiveness, for in doing so, we will truly become children of our Father who is in heaven.

Amen.