**Forgiveness Sunday**

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

Today is a big day in the Orthodox Church!  It is forgiveness Sunday.

Today the Church calls us to forgiveness. We cannot live with one another without forgiveness, for each man is always guilty before others: a husband before his wife, children before their parents, parents before their children, neighbors before their neighbors. We are people, living people, and if we are unable to forgive one another, then the whole world would turn into chaos.

Tomorrow we start our Great Lent.  If Christ’s resurrection is the ultimate victory, and Great Lent is the Superbowl of our spiritual lives, today is the locker room pep talk before the game begins.  The church is our coach.  The coach is giving us the critical message, the one thing we have to keep in mind to make it through the game, and emerge as victors.  What is the coach telling us?  What is the one thing that will give us that yard, that inch that we need to win?  *It’s forgiveness!*  We have to seek forgiveness, and we have to give forgiveness.  It’s very simple to say but difficult to do. Read what Jesus commands us in today’s Gospel reading.

“If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; *but* if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”  Powerful, daunting words, not to be taken lightly.  The criterion for salvation is to give and seek forgiveness, throwing ourselves on the Grace of God. After all, isn’t this what we pray every time we say the Lord’s Prayer: “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us”. No way can these be just words or platitudes. This is our solemn prayer before the Lord God Almighty.  We need to ask God for his forgiveness.  We need to seek the forgiveness of those we have wronged, and we need to forgive those who have wronged us.   With out forgiveness, there is no salvation.

As I have said before, forgiveness is not easy so how can we put ourselves into that state of grace?  It is only by a miracle.  It is only by plugging ourselves into God, by inviting his will into our lives.  And how do we do that?  We do it by entering into prayer, by listening to his word, by receiving his Grace through the sacraments of the church, and that is what this period of Great Lent is all about.  Now is the time to reset our lives.  Now is the time to orient our hearts and minds to the Kingdom of God.

Today is the day to forgive and be forgiven, so that when we proclaim His resurrection, the truth of that proclamation will penetrate our hearts and enlighten our lives.

Lent is about to begin. It is time to wake up and accept the challenging blessing of the coming weeks. It is time to invest ourselves in the new life that Jesus Christ has brought to the world. Now is the time to cultivate the holy habits that will make us the kind of people who treasure our Lord above all else. And when that happens, we will be prepared to follow Him to His Cross and then to behold the glory of His resurrection on the third day. That is the purpose of Great Lent