

GENUINE FORGIVENESS – SAINT JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

Do you want to learn the meaning of the virtue?

God gives the following commandment to people: “Let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart,” and “Let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour.”

Do you see? He doesn’t just say “forgive the evil of the other person,” but “Don’t even have it in your thoughts; don’t ponder it. Set aside all wrath; make the wound disappear.” You think, of course, that by vengeance you are punishing the one who harmed you. Whereas in fact, you yourself have installed anger within yourself as a torturer, and thus you rip apart your own innards.

Have you been treated very unjustly and been deprived of much because of someone else? Have you been slandered and damaged in very serious matters, and so you want to see your brother punished? Even here it is useful to forgive him.

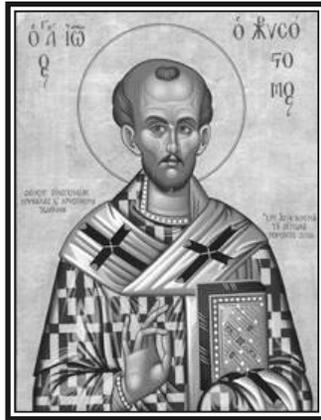
For if you desire to avenge him yourself and attack him—either with your words or with your actions or through a curse—not only will God not take action against him (since you yourself have assumed the responsibility of punishing him) but also He will punish you for fighting against God.

Leave things to God. He will take care of things much better than you yourself can. To you he simply gave the commandment to pray for the person who has grieved you.

Have you argued with someone and hold ill will towards him? Don’t approach Holy Communion!

Do you want to approach? First reconcile yourself with him, and then come near the Blameless Mysteries!

It is not I who say these things but the Lord Himself. In order to be reconciled with the Father, he refused neither to be slaughtered nor to shed His blood. As for you, in order to be reconciled with your fellow man, do you not consent to utter a single word? And you hesitate to run first? Listen to what He says about those who keep this stance: “If thou bring thy gift to



the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother” (Mt. 5:23–24).

If you see a member of your body cut off, won’t you do everything you can to reunite it with your body? Do the same thing with your brothers. When you see that they have been cut off from your love, run quickly and gather them together.

Don’t wait for them to come; you should hurry to win the trophy first!

We have been ordered to have only one enemy—the devil. Only with him should you never be reconciled. Towards your brother, however, never have a heavy heart.

And even if something petty happens, let it pass; do not let it last longer than a day. “Let not the sun go down upon your wrath” (Eph. 4:26).

“Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us” (Mt. 6:12).

Do you see? God made you yourself the judge who forgives your own sins. If you forgive other people few things, few of your own will be forgiven. If you forgive many things, many of your own will be forgiven. If you forgive them with sincerity and with your whole heart, God will forgive yours in the same manner.

If after forgiving you make your enemy into your friend, thus will God also be disposed towards you.

So what punishment doesn’t he deserve who is unwilling to lose 100 pennies in order to receive ten thousand gold coins? Neither does he forgive the small things, and thus the words of his prayer turn against him.

For when you say to God, “Forgive us as we also forgive our enemies,” and then you don’t forgive, you are asking God for nothing but to deprive you of every apology and forgiveness.”

Excerpt from Homily 20 of the Homilies on the Statues to the People of Antioch