

The crafty devil is very good in sowing discord and disagreements between people, which at times even grow into hatred. We may have offended someone unwittingly and might not even be aware of the fact that a person has been hurt by us. Or, we may be carrying a grudge without having the inner strength to let go of the hurt. We cannot, however, reconcile ourselves with our Savior if any enmity is found in our hearts towards anyone.

To help us with this problem, our Savior, wanting the salvation of every single person, provides for us a means by which all people are able to come to peace with each other. The Sunday before the start of Great Lent is Forgiveness Sunday. We are all called to come to the cathedral at 6:00 PM for the evening service, at the conclusion of which our archbishop speaks to the people gathered in church and asks for forgiveness from everyone. Each person then walks up to him and asks forgiveness from him. After this, all the people individually ask forgiveness of each other. In this way, through the mystical Grace given by God, peace is restored in our church family, and we are able to start successfully working on ourselves through fasting to reconcile ourselves with our Savior. We should not forget that every single sin, no matter how minor, separates us from God. Only through repentance can that separation be ended.

My dear brother and sisters, it is my profound hope that you will be able to come to this service. It is an essential part of the beginning of Great Lent. What we often don't understand or underestimate is how intimately we are connected to each other. This connection is wonderfully described in the book, "Thoughts Determine our Lives", by Elder Tadei. For example, two people get into a serious disagreement. The disagreement damages not only them, but also affects everyone around them, even if they were not a party to the disagreement. Our Savior teaches us that we are all members of one mystical body. He adds that if one member of the body is in pain, the pain affects all of the members of the body. We may not be aware of it but mystically we have been damaged. Therefore, even if you think that you are not in enmity with anyone or have no bad feelings toward anyone, you still need to come and participate. If nothing else, you will become Christ-like by helping other people free themselves from their sinfulness. And this act of love is greatly rewarded by our Savior.

In concluding, I would like ask each one of you to forgive me if I have in any way angered or hurt you during the past year. And may God bless all of us to have a rewarding Great Lent leading to a glorious Pascha.

With Love in Christ,

Archpriest Serge Kotar