

# ST. SAVA SERBIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

## JUNE 2009 ANNOUNCEMENTS / NEWS — ОБЈАВЕ / НОВОСТИ

### **Forgiveness and Reconciliation: How to Forgive Others and Receive Forgiveness**

*by Hieromonk Jonah (now Metropolitan Jonah – OCA)*

#### **Q: What is forgiveness?**

**Fr. Jonah:** To forgive means to restore a bond of love and communion when there has been a rupture. Sin ruptures our relationship with God and others, as also do offenses taken and given among people.

When the bond is broken with other people, we tend to objectify them and judge them, not seeing them as persons, but only as objects of our anger and hurt. This is our sinful reaction. We categorize people in terms of their transgression against us. The longer we nurture the anger and alienation, the more deeply the resentment takes hold in our heart, and the more it feeds on our soul. Resentment is a cancer that will destroy us if we don't forgive! It also leaks out and damages our relations with others when we slander and gossip about those who have offended us and try to draw others to our own side. Of course, no one should want to hear such things—but we do!

Forgiveness means overlooking the sin or transgression, and restoring a bond of love. It does not mean justifying the offensive action or accepting it as right, nor does it mean justifying one's own anger or sinful reaction. Forgiveness means laying aside our judgments of the other person and our own sinful reactions, and accepting others for who they are.

God's forgiveness of us and our sins against Him is unconditional and absolute. God does not reject us, objectify us, or bear anger or resentment against us. These are, I think, our projections onto God of our own issues and judgments against ourselves when we sin. God does not punish us. Rather, by alienating ourselves from God, we punish ourselves and ascribe this punishment to Him. We turn in on ourselves in anger and self-hatred, and thus shatter our personhood, cutting ourselves off from His love.

By asking God for forgiveness, we open ourselves to His love and acceptance, His grace and compassion. These were there already, but we neglected them. By confessing our sins, we surrender these areas of our lives where we have justified our self-alienation from God. Repentance means not only turning away from sin, but also turning to God. Judas was remorseful for his sin—but hanged himself. We need not only to be remorseful, but also to open ourselves to God.

#### **Q: How are reconciliation and forgiveness related?**

**Fr. Jonah:** Reconciliation presupposes forgiveness. If we forgive someone, we need to be open to reconciliation, if possible. Reconciliation is forgiveness in action—the actual restoration of the interpersonal bond between two people, in mutual acceptance of each other for who each one is.

Forgiveness and reconciliation can lead to a stronger bond than previously existed. Each time an offense occurs, we can learn more about both the other and ourselves. This can lead to a deeper knowledge and understanding of each by the other, and thus can also lead to a more authentic bond of intimacy. Reconciliation should always be the goal.

Sometimes we feel unable to reconcile—to put forgiveness into our actions and restore a relationship. If the person has severely abused us or our trust, it may not be wise to do so. Or perhaps the person is gone or dead. We can still forgive them, pray for them, and accept them—if only at a distance. We need to look at what is in ourselves that prevents us from reconciling—some fear or expectation of the other. But it is crucial to remember that forgiveness is only fulfilled in reconciliation.

An example of God's forgiveness—and a model for our own—is the parable of the Prodigal Son. Think of the hurt of the father as the young son withdrew into the most selfish kind of rejection and rebellion. The father never ceased to love the son, and was watching and waiting for his return. When the son came to himself, and became aware of his own sin—but not of how much he had hurt his father—he returned. Still thinking only of himself and his own needs, he rehearses how he will ask his father to receive him and make him an employee. But his father doesn't even let him finish his little rehearsed speech. He embraces the son and holds him to himself. He has a robe and ring brought, restoring him as son and heir. He kills the fatted calf as a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God. He neither demands nor wants an apology, nor does he permit any justification or even self-denigration on the part of his son. Rather, he forgives his son from the abundance of his love, casting away any resentment or bitterness, and accepts him for who he is—his beloved son.

This is how God forgives us! So we must forgive each other and be reconciled.

#### **Q: Why is it so hard to forgive those closest to us?**

**Fr. Jonah:** The deeper the bonds of love and intimacy, the sharper the pain of alienation through offenses. The more we truly know someone, the more cutting off the bond of love cuts to the core of who we are. We cannot define ourselves solely in an individualistic, autonomous manner. This is a falsehood, our own egocentrism. Who we are, as Christians, as persons, is a

mystery hidden in Christ of our union with one another. A husband and wife are one flesh in Christ. “My brother is my life,” said St. Silouan. There is a sacred bond of love in friendship, whether in the world or in a monastery. We must be very watchful so as to preserve that bond. But the greater the intimacy is, the greater is the likelihood of deep offenses occurring—because intimacy presupposes vulnerability. This, however, is an aspect of how we grow in knowledge of one another—constant forgiveness and reconciliation. We come to know and accept the other person for who they are. We hopefully begin to recognize our projections and expectations and drop them. Then, we come to know ourselves better through others.

Forgiveness is hard—but it is infinitely sweeter when we reconcile with someone we deeply love. It is hard because it makes us look at our selfishness, our judgment, our expectations, and ourselves. It also shatters the illusions and false objectifications that we have had of the other person, not to mention of the offense itself.

When we have old wounds, even from childhood, we are all the more likely to project onto others our ideas and expectations, which are even more distorted by the old resentments. This is delusion. Our old wounds and resentments may be completely unconscious. They may have been caused by an entirely different person. For example, we project our issues with our parents onto those with whom we develop a close bond. This is the normal dynamic not only of newly married couples, but also of employees with bosses, of students with teachers—and especially, of novices and monks or nuns with their abbot or abbess. When we transfer old unresolved issues onto someone, our idea of that person has very little to do with the person him- or herself. We dredge up old issues with them, and put all the energy of the old resentment into it. This, of course, can destroy relationships.

How do you get out of this? I’m not sure—other than by patience, perseverance, and unconditional love. You have to somehow break through the delusion and see who the person really is.

If we are repeatedly irritated by a person we are close to, it is not their problem, but rather our own. The irritation is our reaction. They are being who they are—and if we have not realized that yet, then we must simply accept them with their character flaws and all. The other person is responsible for his own sins. But I alone am responsible for my reactions.

We have to let go of our resentments of other people, and especially of those closest to us. First, we need to ask ourselves if we want to be angry, bitter, resentful, and unhappy. Then we must look at and take responsibility for our own reactions. We can only change ourselves. Then, we need to try to see the other for who he/she really is, with strengths and weaknesses, sins and foibles, and simply love him/her. This is the basis of forgiveness. Then, we must resolve not to let these things get in the way of that love. We also have to know ourselves. If we admit our own sins and shortcomings, how can we judge anyone else for their sins and failings? It is utter hypocrisy.

Letting go seems hard, but once we do it, we have the most freeing sense of having been liberated from slavery to these demons. First, we need to pray, and ask God to show us ourselves, and to help us to love and forgive. Next, we need to be quiet, and let God show us. He will! Then, we need to be watchful, so that we do not allow ourselves to nurse resentment and bitterness.

**Q: What about when I’ve forgiven, then see the person or hear of him or her, and the old hurt/anger returns afresh? Does this mean I haven’t forgiven?**

**Fr. Jonah:** When we still have an angry reaction to someone, it means that we still have some resentment against them. Forgiveness comes in stages. We may be able to forgive partially, but the roots of the resentment are deep in our passions. So, we still have work to do. This is especially true when it is someone close to us, who really matters to our life. An offense can threaten a relationship that is part of our very identity, so the roots of our reactions can be very deep. Our forgiveness is relative to the degree to which we are free from our continued angry or hurt reaction. When we can love and accept someone without remembrance of the wrong, and without a reaction of anger and hurt, then we have truly forgiven.

Another aspect of this is when we are projecting our expectations onto a person, and they continue to disappoint us. This should show us that our expectations are simply our own selfishness, and that we are failing to love the other unconditionally. We must take responsibility for our own anger and hurt, and simply let the person be him/herself.

**Q: If the other party refuses to acknowledge an offense or show any remorse for his or her part in the breach, what should I do?**

**Fr. Jonah:** The way of humility is to ask forgiveness, and in turn, at least internally, forgive the offender. It does no good to hold onto offenses and to remember wrongs. Let them know how important the relationship is to you. But then the ball is in their court. You cannot force anyone to forgiveness.

**Q: We often work through things verbally—yet we feel guilty when we discuss struggles or anger with another person. Is there a proper place for talking about a problem we’re having, with a friend or confidant?**

**Fr. Jonah:** One role of a spiritual father or mother is to be able to help you work through your anger with someone. It is much easier to talk to your friends and acquaintances, but what that leads to is often a disaster: gossip and slander, self-justification and blaming, seeking sympathy, judgment and condemnation. And soon the person whom you resent is excluded from the community. One should never use a group of friends to talk through resentments and bitterness; while they may support your position, they will seldom make you see or take responsibility for your own sin in the breach. Guilt in such a case is very healthy,

because you have sinned. How seldom it is that we will admit our responsibility for our own reactions among our friends! If we have a close confidant, then perhaps we can talk it through with them. But they need to be impartial, and you must never try to justify yourself or force the other to judge the one who offended you.

**Q: How do we cultivate a spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation, so that offenses don't stick?**

**Fr. Jonah:** We can cultivate a spirit of forgiveness by “never allowing the sun to go down on our anger.” This is a fundamental monastic and Christian precept. If we allow a resentment to take root, it is our sin, no matter what the other person has done to us. Now, we are only human, and this is part of our fallenness. But, when we see it happening, we need to stop ourselves, recognize that we are no different and sin no less than the other, and forgive. Even to seventy times seven, day in and day out.

When someone says or does something to offend us, intentionally or unintentionally, we do not need to react in any way. We can simply take it in, and respond appropriately. This is the principle of nonreaction. It is based on the realization that our reactions are purely our own responsibility, and not caused by a provocation. The provocations will come, but we can choose to react or not, respond or not. There is a story in the desert fathers about a young novice who was told by his elder, “Go and yell at the rock.” So, for half a day, he went and yelled at a rock, insulted, berated, and cursed it. He went back to his elder, who told him, “Now, praise and flatter the rock.” So he went back and praised, flattered, and said nice things to the rock. He went back and his elder asked him, “How did the rock react when you praised it?” “It didn't,” he said. “How did it react when you screamed at it and cursed it?” “It didn't react,” he said. “So,” said the elder, “should you also be impervious to praise or calumny, and react to both in the same way, as did the rock.”

Much of the spiritual life is dedicated to one goal: complete self-mastery, especially in relation to control over one's reactions. The more mature we are, spiritually, the greater control we have over our reactions. In other words, we have to be watchful over our thoughts, and maintain a spirit of love and compassion. When our thoughts accuse others, and we begin to be upset, then we need to cut off the thoughts and recognize that they are temptations. They are more about me than about the other person. The more we let our thoughts against the other fester, the harder it will be to rid ourselves of them, and resentments will develop. The basic principle of non-reaction, not only in deed, but in thought and feeling, and maintaining a spirit of peace, is the key. With this underlying attitude, it becomes difficult to get us to take offense, and thus, there is seldom a need for forgiveness or reconciliation. This, however, is a mark of very great maturity, and few there are that possess it.

**Q: When I've had a serious disagreement with someone, and we have difficulty speaking comfortably to one another, what should I do?**

**Fr. Jonah:** If we have had a serious disagreement, and cannot speak comfortably with one another, then we need to humble ourselves and ask forgiveness for having offended the other. We have to take responsibility for our part. Then it is up to the other to forgive in return. Always return forgiveness when it is asked.

**Q: What are the roots of unforgiveness? What does it do to me if I harbor bitterness? What does it do to the other person? What are the corresponding healing virtues for this passion?**

**Fr. Jonah:** The roots of unforgiveness are pride, vainglory, arrogance, and conceit. If I refuse to forgive someone, it is my sin. I can no longer pray the Lord's Prayer (...and forgive us our debts/trespases as we forgive our debtors/those who trespass against us...) damning myself, nor approach the Chalice. We refuse to forgive because we feel justified in our resentment and bitterness. We cast all the blame and criticism on the other, and blind ourselves to the reality of our own faults. Thus, we live in delusion. To harbor bitterness is unadulterated pride and conceit, and we alienate ourselves from Christ. Resentment and bitterness are cancer in the soul, which will destroy us if we do not forgive and become reconciled. Such bitterness is often the root of addictions, which are simply attempts to anesthetize the pain of our own self-condemnation. We torment ourselves with the remembrance of wrongs and wallow in our self-pity, thinking ourselves the innocent victims. Seldom is this the reality, except in some cases of abuse.

When we have rage built up within ourselves, which has been stored up perhaps for years, maybe as the result of abuse or victimization, the process becomes far more complex. It takes a long time to work through such rage, so that our reactions do not come out sideways.

Christ is the ultimate example of complete forgiveness, of non-reaction, and of authentic humility. He did not revile and curse His captors and tormentors, those who slandered Him, bore false witness against Him, even tortured and crucified Him. “As a sheep led to the slaughter, and as a blameless lamb is dumb, so He opened not His mouth.” We have countless examples of Christian martyrs bearing all kinds of torments and sufferings for Christ's sake, in a spirit of forgiveness, peace, and reconciliation.

When we truly are innocent victims of someone else's sins, the only thing to do is to forgive them. If we harbor resentment, we repeatedly victimize ourselves with the sin of the other every time we remember their wrong and indulge in our resentment. Forgiveness is the only way to healing.

Sometimes people refuse to receive our forgiveness. To refuse forgiveness is pride and conceit, self-justification. If someone does not want to be forgiven— often because he cannot or will not forgive himself—our forgiveness and compassion is like “burning coals heaped on his head.” So also is God’s forgiveness of us: not to judge or condemn us, but to lead us to repentance.

The burning coal of love is torment when we refuse to accept forgiveness or forgive ourselves. We cannot accept love when we hate ourselves. But it is precisely this divine love that will heal us because it exposes our self-hatred. In self-hatred we are too ashamed to accept forgiveness, are closed in on ourselves, fearing that exposure of ourselves to ourselves. And so we act out. But if we can turn, repent, and begin to let in the love of God and of others, then that love can begin to transform our souls.

We can only fight against the spirit of pride, unforgiveness, and self-condemnation with humility, love, and compassion. Humility does not mean bowing and scraping. Rather, it is being nakedly honest with oneself and others. We have to speak the truth in love; but we can only do this in the brutal honesty of humility, seeing our own sins and realizing the other is no different from ourselves. We can address offenses, but if there is no love in our speech and attitude, there is no truth, only facts. And facts do not heal, only love and compassion.

**Q: What does real reconciliation look like? How come we see so few examples of this in action, in the Church, and so many instances of broken fellowship and relationships?**

**Fr. Jonah:** Real reconciliation means complete and authentic acceptance of one another, despite sins, offenses, and transgressions: an authentic bond between persons in a spirit of love and humility. There will always be sins and offenses. We must never allow ourselves to criticize and judge one another, because it is always hypocrisy. We only judge others because we see in them our own faults and insecurities mirrored back to us. But if we can live in mature forgiveness and communion with others, in humility accepting one another as God accepts us, then our communities and churches will be transparent—revealing the Kingdom of Heaven, filled with divine grace.

The sad reality of our churches and lives, marriages and friendships, is that we are fallen, broken, and passionate. We justify ourselves in arrogant conceit, and refuse to forgive or to see our own faults. So our communities shatter, marriages break up, and friendships end. Ultimately, this is because we put the gratification of our egos as the main criterion of relationships, rather than the humble and unconditional love of the other that is demanded by the Gospel.

**Q: How often is the lack of forgiveness at the heart of our parish battles, of our marriage problems, and of our problems with our kids?**

**Fr. Jonah:** Lack of forgiveness is the core of almost all our parish battles. Marriage problems and relationships with our kids also have lack of forgiveness at the core. Resentments build up and fester, we heap selfish expectations on one another and can’t see one another for who we really are. So it’s no wonder that relationships break down. To have a spirit of forgiveness means to be authentically open to one another, despite wrongs and sins. If we can do this, there is nothing that cannot be healed.

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**CHURCH SLAVA**

Thanks to everyone for organizing this celebration especially to kumovi Zoran, Svetlana, Maria, Vanja and Pavle Glisic for their contribution to the church this last year and preparing the slava kolach, zito and lunch. Milan Radic and Srdjan Jovic helped rehabilitate the soccer goals with Michael Walker’s help. Nenad Bjelogrljic and Djordje Kablar helped serve refreshments. Other helpers: Zoran, Snezana, Bora and Marina Banjanin, Bozurka Morisson-Pejcic, Dragana Bojanic, Milevka Beribak, Dalibor and Bjanka Marceta, Milan and Aleksandra Stefanovic, Srdjan and Silvija Jakovljevic, Slavica Stevanovic, and Branka Vujic.

The slava celebration was well attended including Fr. Nikola Todorovic and parishioners from Portland. Everyone enjoyed a beautiful day picnicking in the sunshine, playing soccer and listening to the music of Mile Kovacevic, Marko Vukadinovic, and Rdr. Aleksandar and others. This year’s kumovi – domaćini/hosts - are Darko and Michelle Hrle.  
(pictures)

**BESSINGS AND SACRAMENTS**

**Birth & 8-day Prayers:** Milisav Manojlovic.

**Healing Prayers:** Slobodan Novakovic.

**Slavas: St. George:** Families of Dusan (Dan) Cekarmis, Dragan Djukic, Keith Fournier, Bogdan Gavrilovic, Goran Kundacina, Goran Martinovic, Danijel Plavsic, Marko Radmilac, and Fr. Ilija Balach. **St. Mark:** Dejan Subotic Family. **St. Jeremiah:** Families of Mihailo Korzynek, Milorad Manojlovic.

**Funeral:** Slobodan Novakovic

**Parastoses / Pomens:** Andjelko Trifkovic, Slobodan Novakovic

## **THANK YOU !**

**NEW CANDLE STAND:** The Church is thankful to Dan & Gordana Cekarmis and Family for the fabrication and installation of the new candle stand.

**LUNCH PREPARERS:** Spomenka Novakovic and Slobodanka Petrovic; Protinica Carole Balach.

## **VIDOVDAN**

Vidovdan falls on Sunday, June 28 this year. We will have a parastos after Divine Liturgy for all those who sacrificed their lives to protect the Honorable Cross and Golden Freedom followed by a lenten lunch. Let's give respect and honor to all of these fallen heroes.

## **COMMITTEES**

We still need people to join the following committees. Please consider spending some of your time in God's service.

**STEWARDSHIP** - Douglas Yaguchi, 425 - 391 0832.

**BUILDING – PROPERTY MAINTENANCE** - Cedo Marusic, 425 – 917 2467.

**OUTREACH** (to parishioners in need)- Darko Hrle, 425 – 831 5684.

## **PROJECTS**

While the weather permits exterior projects for this summer will include regrading the soccer field and parking lot, and relocating the trash dumpster. All those interested to help in labor or donations can contact Darko Hrle at 425 – 831 5684. We have a need for fill dirt, topsoil, and gravel. Let Darko know where we can obtain this material at no cost.

## **SUMMER CAMPS**

### **CHILDREN'S CAMP**

Camp St. Sava of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Jackson, CA will be held July 12 – July 18, July 19 – July 25, and July 26 – August 1. All children are welcome. If you register early before the deadline of June 22, 2009, you can save \$50 per camper. For further information visit [www.campstsava.org](http://www.campstsava.org) or contact Fr. Ilija.

### **RETREAT**

St. John the Wonderworker Serbian Orthodox Church in Eugene, OR is organizing a Family Retreat at Sky Camp (SE of Eugene) July 27 through July 31, 2009. This is a camp for the whole family where there are activities for all ages in a setting of fellowship and worship. Registration deadline is June 30, 2009. Contact Fr. Ilija for further information.

## **DIOCESE DAYS**

Our Diocese will be holding its 13th Diocese Days in Jackson, CA September 4 – September 6, 2009 (Labor Day Weekend). All parishioners are welcome to attend. The theme this year is "Receive One Another." The parishes of St. Andrew in Anderson, CA; Holy Trinity in Butte, MT; St. John in Denver, CO; Assumption in Fair Oaks, CA; St. Peter in Fresno, CA; Holy Trinity in Moraga, CA; St. Stephen in Portland, OR; and St. Sava in Issaquah, WA are hosts for this event. All parishioners from these parishes are contributing some effort to make this event a success. If you would like to help in any way contact Fr. Ilija Balach, the Diocesan chairperson for this event. There are number of ways that you can help. One is to plan and attend the event and volunteer for some work. The other is to make a donation as a sponsor of this event in the amount of \$500 or \$1,000; or as a supporter for any amount; and / or offer a greeting or advertisement that will be published in the yearbook. This yearbook will have informative articles, past year events in the Diocese, greetings / ads, and names of all donors. Enclosed is a letter from Bishop Maxim and order form that is due by June 15, 2009. Email your greeting/ad in a pdf or MS Word document to [secretary.westsrbdio@gmail.com](mailto:secretary.westsrbdio@gmail.com) and make your check payable to "Western American Diocese" and mail to: The Western American Diocese, 1621 West Garvey Ave., Alhambra, CA 91803. More information is available on our Diocesan website: [www.westsrbdio.org](http://www.westsrbdio.org) .

## **DIOCESES RECONFIGURED**

The boundaries of the dioceses in North America have been reconfigured so that no overlaps of dioceses exist in the Serbian Church. See Diocesan News at <http://westsrbdio.org/index.html> for more detailed information.

## **CONCERT**

You are invited to a concert June 13, 2009 of Eastern European Folk Music featuring our Reader Aleksandar Eppler on the cimbalom. See attached flyer for more information.

## **SLAVA & GROUND BREAKING**

St. John the Forerunner Monastery in Goldendale, WA will be celebrating their Slava, Nativity of St. John, and blessing the ground for their new church building on June 24, 2009 starting at 8:00 a.m. Everyone is welcome. Metropolitan Gerasimos will officiate.

## **SOCCER TEAM**

There is a growing interest to resurrect our soccer team as was evidenced by energetic play and cheering spectators on May 17 during our slava celebration. Anyone interested in participating or supporting our team can contact Nenad Vujic at 206 – 878 2708.

## **STEWARDSHIP**

We currently have 65 stewards for 2009. For the Glory of God, please acknowledge your support of St. Sava Church by filling out your stewardship card and mailing it in this month. Thank you!

Patricia Bache  
Carole Balach  
Zarko Berberski  
Dragan Beribak  
Risto Bozic  
Bronko Cekarmis  
Dan Cekarmis  
Gordana Cekarmis  
Penka Dringova  
Dragan Dukic  
Nick Drzayich  
Bogdan & Georgiana Gavrilovic  
Zoran Glisic  
Darko Hrle  
Srdjan & Silvija Jakovljevic  
Cathy Jankovich  
Mike Jankovich  
Sam Jankovich  
Radomir Jasika  
Savo Jovic  
Djordje Kablar  
Neven Kablar  
Anna Kassianov  
Vojislav Kokeza  
Jasmina Kostic  
Mile Kovacevic  
Ljiljana Luksetich  
Chris & Paula Macris  
Mirko & Ana Mandic  
Cedo Marusic  
Vjera Melton  
Dusan Miladinovic

Milanka Miladinovic  
Sava Milovanovic  
Sreten Nesic  
Gospava Nikolic  
Spomenka Novakovic  
Vera Orlandic-Hodak  
Sonja Orlovic  
Sava Pavlica  
Judy Petrovic  
Danijel Plavsic  
Dragan Popovich  
Boyanne Popovich-Schmidt  
Aleksandra Radojevic  
Vladimir Radojevic  
Maria Radosavljevic  
Koviljka Samardzic  
Alex Samsonov  
Jovica Spasic  
Cheryl Spasojevic  
Radoje Spasojevic  
Goran Stankovic  
K. Stefanovic  
Mile Stevanovic  
Dejan & Gordana Subotic  
Goran Trbic  
Jovo Trbic  
Andjelko Vasic  
Nenad Vujic  
Mary Jane Vujovic  
Douglas Yaguchi  
Svetlana Yaguchi  
Uros Zecevic  
Golub Zekanovic

## **HOUSEKEEPER NEEDED**

An elderly Orthodox lady, Ruth Stergo, who lives near downtown Bellevue and is a member of Assumption Greek Orthodox Church, has a need for a housekeeper two times a week. Contact her at: 425 – 269 8819 if you are interested.