Sermon for Sunday 5th October 2025

*“Love your enemies”.* In today’s Gospel reading, Christ gives us a sublime, entirely new command. We know how easy it is to be kind to those who treat us well. But Christ called His disciples to something much higher — to the very likeness of God, our heavenly Father, who *“is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish.”* To show mercy to someone in this way, is to act as a true child of God, the maker of heaven and earth, whom we dare to call “Our Father”.

Love for those who harm us – in whatever way, with their actions, or words, or with their silence – is only possible when our hearts are pure. When Christ was teaching on another occasion in Capernaum, many of his followers found His word too “hard” to bear and left Him (John 6:60). We understand why they did so. St. Paul explains it clearly: for God to dwell in us as in His temple, our hearts must be cleansed from all idols, from all passions that enslave us — anger, resentment, greed, envy, selfishness, pride. When we cling to these idols, we cannot be truly free, such as God wishes us to be, so that we become *“the temple of the living God”.*

Before God can make us entirely His, we must do what the prophets of old, whom St Paul had in mind, encouraged the believers of their day to do: “*to come out and be separate”*. This radical separation from all idolatry has a divine purpose: *“let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”* To be merciful is not a weakness but displays the super-human strength of a heart which is pure and free, the heart of the blessed who *“shall see God”.*

Here we can remember the witness of St. Silouan the Athonite. He lived Christ's commands in their fullness and never allowed hatred into his heart. In his love, he prayed for those who persecute the Church. He had received as a Divine revelation a simple and yet radical teaching: *“Keep your mind in hell, and despair not.”* In other words, strive for humility, remembering your own sin, and the fallen nature of all humanity, and never lose hope in God’s mercy.

Saints, like the monk Cosmas whom we commemorate today, remind us that our struggle for a life of holiness is not in vain, for it leads to eternal blessedness with God. St Cosmas had a vision of the joys of the righteous in the radiant gardens of paradise, and of the fearful punishments of those who had left no space for God’s light in their hearts. The images in St Cosmas’s vision are meant to convey what the Apostle Paul wrote, *“Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those who love Him”* (1 Cor. 2:9).

Lifting our minds from earthly symbols to heavenly truths, let us ask ourselves today: Who are my enemies? What idols occupy my heart? How do I act in a merciful way in this situation? And let us pray to the Lord to cleanse our hearts with the power of his All-holy and Life-creating Spirit, so that He may come and abide in us, forever. Amen.