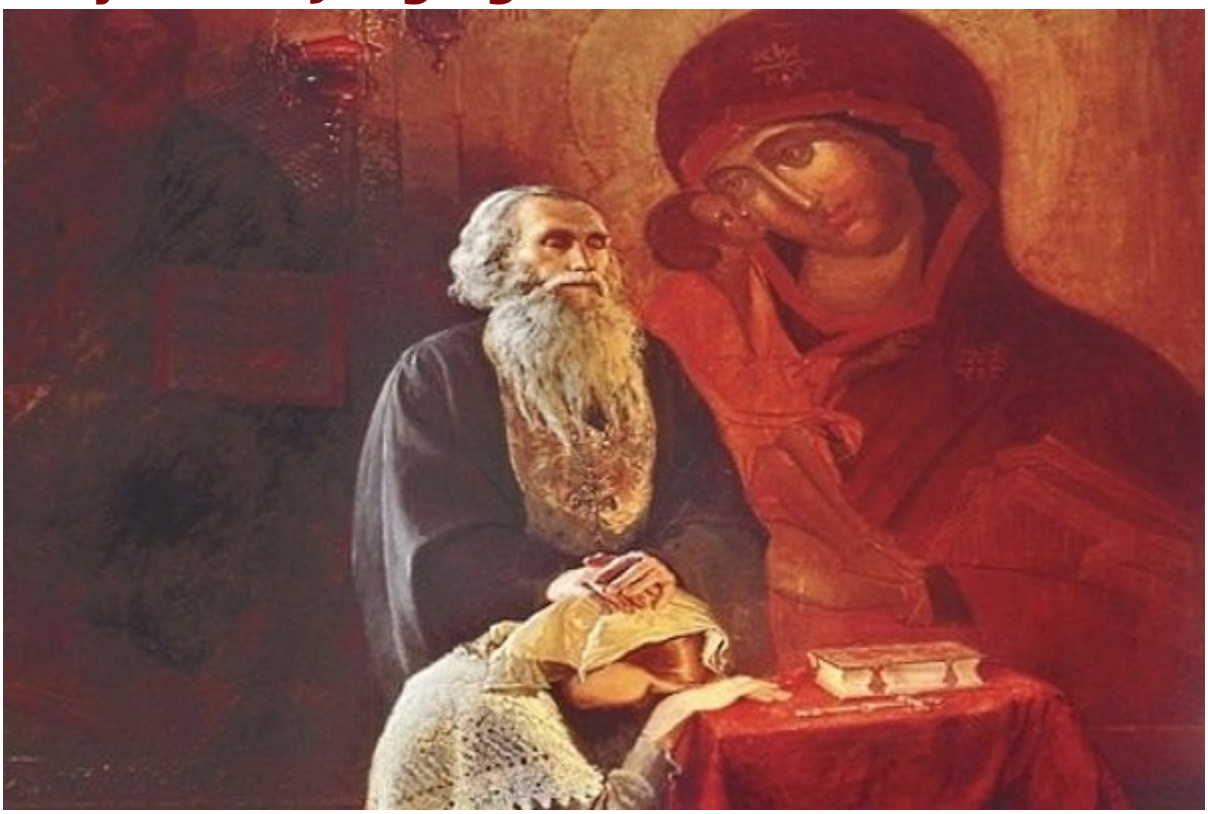
09/06/2020

A Story about Judging Others



Elder Panaretos Filotheitis

The late Papa-Nikodimos, a spiritual father from the Skete of Kavsokalyvia told me the following story, which is recorded in Athonite Patristic manuscripts.

There was a devout Christian who went to his confessor for fifteen years and told him his human weaknesses. One day he went as usual to make his confession, but when he opened the door he found the man fornicating with a woman. He left immediately and, as he did so, he said to himself: ‘What on earth’s just ?. This is terrible. I’ve been confessing to him for years and now what am I going to do? Will I go to hell? All the sins I’ve confessed to him, given he’s such a sinner, are they forgiven or not? All they all still unforgiven?’ The man was stunned at the evil that had befallen him and didn’t know what to do.
After he’d left, he became thirsty on the way back home. He carried on for a little and came across a small brook, in which pure water babbled. He bent down and drank. He slaked his thirst and didn’t feel at all like leaving, because he wanted to drink some more of that lovely water. Then a thought crossed his mind: ‘If the stream’s so good down here, how much more so will it be near where it starts?’ With this thought he set out to follow the brook back to its source. But when he got

there, what did he see? He saw the water coming out of the dead, dirty carcass of a dog. The water was coming out of the dog's mouth! Then he sighed deeply and said. 'What a thing to happen to me, wretch that I am. I've been polluted by this filthy water. It seems I'm a great sinner and very impure if these things are happening to me'.

He was really troubled by this, but then an angel of the Lord appeared to him and said: 'Why are you troubled and saddened by what's happening to you? When you drank the water from the brook, didn't you enjoy it, because it was so pure? You couldn't get enough of it, yet now, when you've seen it coming out of the impure mouth of a dog, you say you're polluted. My friend, don't worry that the dog's dead and unclean, because the water you and everybody else drank, may, indeed, have come from the unclean mouth of a dog, but it wasn't the dog's. The water's from God; it's a gift from Him.

In the same way, the man who heard your confession, the forgiveness he gave you, it wasn't his. That forgiveness is a gift from God. He gives it. The All-Holy Spirit grants it to those who purely and sincerely confess their sins and weaknesses. The difference is that what God gives and grants to people is given and granted through canonically ordained priests who have permission to hear confessions and to remit sins. As the Lord said to the Apostles: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you remit people's sins, they are remitted; and if you retain them, they have been retained". So the Holy Apostles gave this authority to the bishops and their successors and they did the same for those who are canonically ordained and are confessors. For this reason and because they perform God's holy sacraments, the priests are superior in office even to a king and the supreme leader of a people. Priests are superior to all others, in the sense that they alone are able to forgive sins. There is no other way. This is the Sacred Tradition of our Holy Church'.

The angel went on to say: 'Go and make a prostration and ask forgiveness of your confessor, because you saw him sinning. Ask him to forgive you for judging him… As regards the sin he committed, God will examine him and He alone will judge the man. You saw him sin, but you don't know if he repented, or what form his repentance took. So you have the sin of being condemnatory, but, if he repents he'll reap the fruits of his repentance and his mended ways. We aren't in a position to judge anybody else'.

After the angel had said this to this faithful Christian, he disappeared from sight. As the angel had told him to do, the man went back to his confessor, to whom he told what he'd seen and what the angel of the Lord had said to him. He made a prostration to him and told him in full what had passed between him and the angel.

The priest repented, with tears in his eyes, wept bitterly and asked forgiveness of Our All-Merciful, All-Loving and All-Good God. He mended his wicked ways, for the glory of God and the salvation of his soul.

When my spiritual father, Papa-Nikodimos, continued, he said to me with love: ‘This is why, my dear Haralambos (this happened back in 1934, when I wasn’t yet a monk, so he called me by my lay name), we have no right to judge the behavior of others. As Saint Paul says: “Who are you to judge the servant of another?” (this is in the Epistle to the Romans). How much more this is true about condemning the clergy, priests, confessors and monastics in general, who God tests very thoroughly and against whom the devil wages the most subtle warfare. God Himself tells us “Do not judge, so that you might not be judged” and “You will be judged as you have judged, and will be measured by the same measure as you have used”. We must forgive the sins of others and repent. We should judge and condemn only ourselves. If we want to be saved, we have to forgive other people. The Gospel commands: “If you forgive people their transgressions, God will forgive you yours. As you forgive, you will be forgiven”’.

Judging others is a great sin, my brothers and sisters and we should never concern ourselves with the failings and misdemeanors of other people. It’s none of our business. What we do is for ourselves. For our own part, anything we see or hear, we just have to forgive, love and try to help people as much as we can.

pemptousia.com