

**Father Steven Scoutas**  
**EASTER 2010 SERMON**

There are many critical moments during Holy Week which define our trust and faith in our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Each one of us is humbled by different events in the course of Holy week. For me, the most acutely challenging moment of Holy Week is not the Resurrection of Christ – that’s easy for God the Son who raised the dead on so many occasions during his mission of love to humankind. His own Resurrection is a historical fact attested to not only by the Holy Scriptures but also by contemporary non-Christian historians and observers from the time of Jesus.

But, having already endured extreme, incomparable humiliation in His divine nature, being betrayed by those whom He created together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, the moment when Jesus’ human body is about to die, nearing His last breath, our Lord utters those mystifying words that express the essence of His mission in the world: “Father forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Lk 23:34).

This intercession is not only for those who sentenced and crucified Jesus, but for all of humanity – a people who have no insight into the profound mystery of God’s salvation. Jesus speaks these words not as a request, but with divine authority. Their great sin would have been forgiven them had they repented. Indeed, one of the soldiers did repent and is considered a saint of the Church – St Cornelius.

Let’s put this into context. God is being crucified by human beings without reason. He is in excruciating pain, yet still finds the inner strength to forgive the perpetrators of this evil deed. What a powerful and inspiring example from our Lord.

But let’s check ourselves out. Most of the time, we can’t even forgive those who ask for our forgiveness. We are so full of our self-importance and uncontrollable ego, that we sever relations with those whom we love. Most of the time, over silly things. She said this. He did that. We swear. We intimidate. We become hard-hearted. And we lose sight of the fact that life is so short. How different things would be if we abided by the simple words of Jesus.

So, precisely where do we stand as Orthodox Christians when Jesus says: “I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.” This is the second hardest instruction given to us by Jesus. The hardest is “be perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Mth 5:48). Not good. Not very good. But perfect. We cannot achieve this without God’s grace.

But I pose the question to your souls this evening. If we react with unmeasured anger in any difficult situation, how do we differ from those who do not follow Christ? We have been baptized in Christ. We receive Him in Holy Communion. We have the high privilege of being members of His Church. But is our example befitting of our qualification as Christians?

If only we could lower our pride and our ego enough to sincerely ask for God’s mercy we would be taking a huge step in the right direction. Three words: “Lord have mercy”, if offered with a contrite heart, can soften our hearts and change our lives.

We especially pray for young married couples and parents this evening . It’s so difficult being a parent in these testing times. Once young children have gotten over Thomas the Train, Dora, C-Beebies, Wiggles, even Star Wars, they become techno-savvy very quickly. By Kindy they are computer-literate and before they become teenagers, they are into gaming consoles playing Medal of Honour, Lord of War and other pathetically violent material. By the time parents know it, their children are into YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, My Space and other media which can be a parent’s nightmare.

But adults are equally vulnerable. With the veil of so-called maturity, they often surf the net on sites incompatible with a Christian lifestyle and watch immoral material like it's an acceptable part of social behaviour. Herein lies the hypocrisy. We condemn criminals but so easily gloss over the practices in our private lives that are so destructive to our souls and diminish our already myopic view of life.

To the many married couples who have come to this Service for some meaning, take heart. You are under enormous financial pressure. Your relationship might be suffering diverse strains. But let's get back to basics. Back to respect, trust and loyalty. Firstly to God, then to ourselves, then to our spouse. It's not easy, but all is achievable with good will.

Then again, loyalty to most values and institutions is taking a hammering in more recent years. Children, for instance, find it difficult to remain loyal to their football team. If their team doesn't win the premiership for one or two years, that's enough reason for them to 'abandon ship' and follow another more successful team. And dads don't set a better example when they actually bet against their own team. So let's get back to the good old value of commitment to our marriage and family. It's not always easy, but we can do it with God.

And a word to the do-gooding peeps who stick their noses into other people's business. If you've nothing good to say, focus on the rubbish in your own backyard. Every home has its own problems. No one is immune. For Heaven's sake.

Parents of children with special needs, and particularly autism, we bow to you tonight with admiration and take inspiration from your example. Not only are you keeping your marriages together but you are demonstrating great patience and strength in caring for your autistic children.

When Father Andrew and I visited your homes during Epiphany, you told us with tears in your eyes that that the Church and St Spyridon College should give priority to children with autism. Your voice has been heard. Your cry for support has been registered and I can tell you this evening that I have taken your plea to the Committee, and the needs of autistic children are firmly on our Parish's agenda. We are 'fighting' to secure appropriate funding for the education of your children at our school and I am certain that you will respond to the call when we ask it of you. Thank you for your strong example.

To the thousands of faithful gathered outside our beautiful church you are a wonderful People of God. Despite the rain, from where I stand, it looks like a record crowd tonight. On my left, you are gathered all the way past the Shell petrol station. And to my right, all the way past our College. It seems as though the 'pilgrimage' to St Spyridon for the Resurrection Service is well and truly written in your annual diaries.

But, it's starting to sprinkle and that's probably a tap on the shoulder from God that I should terminate this sermon. So, may the Lord bless you and your families with the saving Grace of His glorious Resurrection.

And, before you leave, let us all affirm once again with one voice: "Christ is Risen!" "Truly He is Risen!", "Christ is Risen!" "Truly He is Risen!", "Christ is Risen!" "Truly He is Risen!". God bless you all.