

From the Pastors Corner: Forgiveness

Many years ago I went on a Parish Renewal training program in Seattle. It was a very special experience. One evening we were asked to gather together in groups of three and share the three greatest hurts in our lives that we needed to forgive. There were two other priests and myself. One of the priests was from the Seattle diocese and the other was Vietnamese, I don't remember his diocese. We never spoke to each other before or since. It was one of the most transforming experiences of my life. When I returned to the parish, before I could share what had happened, people would say to me, "Father you are different". I guess the effect of forgiveness was even visible in my body. The parable of the Prodigal Son is my favorite parable. Everything we need to know about God. I love the part that says while he was still a long way off his father caught sight of him. It means that he was out there every day hoping for his son's return. A reminder to us that no matter how we fail or how we sin, God never gives up on us. He just awaits us to receive us with open arms.

John Donne in his poem "**The Seasons of God's Mercy**" says:

God's mercy is always in season.
God never says you should have come yesterday.
God never says you must come again tomorrow.
But today if you hear his voice he will hear you.

One of the greatest privileges as a priest is to be an instrument of God's mercy in confession. It has been said that a Lawyer sees people at their worst, a Priest sees people at their best and a Doctor sees people as they really are.

However in confession, a priest encounters people at their most honest and full of humility. Always remember we are there not to judge but to forgive.

While there is no limit to God's mercy, the real challenge for us is to imitate God's forgiveness.

Let me give you one reason why you should never, pray, The Our Father. When we say the words "*forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us,*" we are saying to God, if I do not forgive those that I should forgive, please don't forgive me.

Forgiveness is an integral part of being a Christian. It is not an optional extra. Being a Christian is being a good forgiver. Unfortunately, many people find it difficult, almost impossible to forgive. Many people carry resentment, anger and hate that truly wreck their lives. When we hold on to resentment, it is like a spiritual cancer.

Resentment – We become a slave to the other person. It is like swallowing poison and waiting for the other person to die. The only exit is forgiveness. Forgiveness is not condoning what has happened but releasing the person from the punishment that they deserve.

Love and hate like oil and water. In order to love the people we love, we have to rid ourselves of all anger, resentment and hate. That's why the people could see the difference in me when I returned from Seattle.

Through forgiveness we experience the healing of memories. It isn't that we forget but when we remember there is no longer the pain.

Remember that you forgive not for the other person's sake but for your sake. And when you do you will experience a freedom, a peace that is truly a graced experience.

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