

## Living the Spirit -Forgiveness

As we begin the time for our Lenten observance, it seems to me that there is one thing that we seek with greater intensity in our spiritual life. That is forgiveness. So often we come face to face with the need for this grace. And, we realize that without it we are truly not at peace with ourselves, with others and with our God.

That is why when we come to our weekly Mass we find ourselves beginning our prayer with a short act of penance, seeking forgiveness for all those sins and weaknesses that encumber ourselves – and perhaps even for those that can be assigned to the whole world. We begin with a prayer, often the Confiteor, and we confess or admit that we have gravely sinned, through our most grievous fault.

When the Church makes this confession as a community of faith, it images the actions of the Lord Himself. Jesus, who was sinless, took on the sins of the world, not as some general accumulation of sin, but as encompassing all sin, even our own personal sins. Through His Passion and Death he offers the Sacrifice for all sins of every person in every age and time. The Mass is a real and true representation of that Sacrifice, though in an unbloody manner. It is through the Mass that we realize that the Lamb of God takes away the sins we have committed.

Forgiveness does not come to us as a solitary grace. It comes with a necessary love and compassion. In many ways it is a divine act to forgive. We reflect on how God uses forgiveness to help us change our hearts. We learn that through forgiveness we can become loving persons, compassionate in the eyes of others, because we have received love, compassion and forgiveness ourselves.

Forgiveness is at the center of the teachings of many of the world's religions. We see this in the observance of Yom Kippur, a Day of Atonement, the most solemn day of the year for Jews. It is in this observance that faithful followers of the Old Covenant find peace. It is through this that progress can be made toward moving past old conflicts.

In the New Testament we find Jesus repeating messages of love and forgiveness. Jesus said of the sinful woman: *Many sins are forgiven her because she has loved much.* He said to the paralytic: *Your sins are forgiven you; take up your mat and walk.* He said in his teaching: *whenever you stand and pray, forgive if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.* Dying on the Cross he says: *Father, forgive them; they know not what they are doing.*

There is also the marvelous parable of the Prodigal Son. There we see how Jesus reveals the boundless mercy of God as Father. And in our Mass just before Communion, do we not pray: Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us? In this we repeat the prayer Jesus taught his disciples.

In a Christopher News Notes I found this example of how forgiveness is not just to be in words said or even actions of repentance. It can be made a way of life. I read how the Amish forgave the gunman who killed five girls in one-room schoolhouse. They visited his parents and widow to let them know that they had forgiven him. And this was not an empty gesture. It was sincere and heart-felt.

When we come to ourselves, we need to ask what is there really that we cannot forgive. Surely, not when we live the Our Father. Not when we have the life of our spirit attuned to the will of the Holy Spirit. If we do this, are there graces we may find ourselves blessed with? Yes, peace and hope. Science tells us that holding grudges makes

a person stressful, and complicates bodily functions. Failing to forgive hurts us far more than any other.

I must admit that forgiving is not forgetting. Sometimes it is remembering. This is not easy to explain to you, but it is a truth that can be learned from experience. It may mean finally remembering another with love, a love that too often has escaped us. There may seem to be some actions that are unforgiveable, but so often we must admit that such actions have not taken away our freedom to forgive. We can find a way to let go the pain of memory. We do that when we forgive. So we find that memory does not control us. We are spiritually free. How wonderful that freedom feels.

Finally, in this reflection on forgiveness, think about what we find in Luke 6: 37-38: *Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven; give and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.*

**Lent is a time to escape condemnation.** It is a time to allow forgiveness to bring its grace of love – a love that overflows with goodness, a love that comes from God and becomes our very own. Perhaps the forgiveness we seek is for ourselves from this loving Savior-God. Perhaps, it may be a forgiveness that we should give to another. “Today, forgive someone who has hurt you – or pardon yourself for a past mistake. Accept yourself and others, faults and all. You’ll be able to embrace today without resentment and, with the freedom to find inner peace, move on.” [Christopher Notes]

**Lent is a time to move on** in the journey of our life, a journey that began with God and will take us back to Him in His good time. Lent is a time for living to the full in our spiritual life.

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Dear Friends, let me share with you my own prayerful recollection on this subject, made to the Lord Himself. *“Lord, I know even after these many years that Lent means a time for prayer, fasting and charitable works. I must admit that at times it seems so hard to give myself to these acts, when there is so much else that draws me to other activity. Then, Lord, I think of my past, as I often do, and remind myself how as a child I was taught to make little sacrifices during this season. I guess there were a few times when I cheated a bit, but I was blessed by a parent who hid that tempting candy! It was a blessing that at school the Sisters, and later the priests who taught me, managed to encourage prayer. How we would stay, my friends and I, after school (high school) to say the rosary in the auditorium. And then, how easy it was to make a good Lent in the seminary – everything fell in order so well. Lord, teach me to pray this Lent, as I should. Let my prayers be from my heart. Let them unite me with You.*

*Lord, I think of the possibility that I could do my part in advancing the good of the Church in these days. I could pray and fast for the success of the Bishops’ campaign to save the rights of conscience in our beloved land. Give me the grace of strength to do just that. I could also find a way to share what I have received with those in need. All that mail that comes asking for help will help me decide how I should do this.*

*Lord, I know how indebted I am to those around me. I sometimes feel so helpless in returning goodness to them for goodness received. But I know I can ask you to pay my debts. Lord, I must close my reflection now. But I shall talk to You again. Amen.”*

***God bless you always, but especially this Lent!***

***Monsignor David Morrison***