



FORGIVENESS: WHAT IT IS; WHAT IT IS NOT!!

The website "The Scoop" tells the tale of a teenage girl and her sister whose father left the family when they were very young. They hadn't seen him since then. One morning he called and left a message on the telephone answering machine with a number to call. Angrily, they ignored the message and refused to return the call.

The Gospel on this Third Sunday of Easter features the rehabilitation of Peter by the risen Lord. Three times in the passion narrative, Peter, despite his thick Galilean accent and less than subtle smell of fish, denied that he knew this Jesus of Nazareth who had just been arrested and was being tried inside for blasphemy. The risen Lord does not come right out and tell Peter that he must ask for forgiveness. The risen Lord does not try to make Peter feel guilty for what he had done. The risen Lord doesn't give Peter the passive-aggressive silent treatment by refusing to speak to him until he apologizes. The risen Lord has come up with an ingenious way to help Peter not only forgive him, but have that forgiveness rooted in love.

Forgiveness is the mark of the Christian. To refuse to forgive and still retain the name of Christian is the ultimate hypocrisy. We are in the year of Luke. In Luke's passion narrative on Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion we heard Jesus pray for his persecutors. Jesus forgave his persecutors even though they showed no remorse. We may not envision our God as having any anxiety, but God is most anxious to forgive us our sins, our failures to love others as we have been loved by God. Forgiving those who have hurt us badly is practically an inhuman task. We must ask for the strength and grace of the Holy Spirit through prayer. Only God can help us to forgive.

We need to forgive not only for the good of the person who has offended us, but for ourselves as well. Recent studies show that people who have forgiven others live a richer, more grace-filled life. Why do we refuse to forgive? Having a sense of moral superiority. Having high blood pressure and a weakened immune system. Allowing those who have wronged us to rent too much space in our minds.

What forgiveness is not. It isn't weakness, it is strength. It isn't lacking courage, but embracing courage by letting go. It is never about placing yourself back in an abusive relationship. It isn't excusing the hurtful behavior.

How can we forgive? Do not deny the hurt. Don't deny your feelings. Place yourself in the wrongdoers' shoes to see if you can understand why they did what they did. Ask for the help of God, your guardian angel, your patron saint, your confirmation patron saint. Imagine people you know who can forgive. Do they live a richer, fuller life, living every day for itself rather than being filled with hurt and anger and resentment? '

When we eat and drink the Body and Blood of Christ we gradually, little by little, Sunday after Sunday, become what we eat-the Body and Blood of Christ, the very Christ who prayed: "Father forgive them, they know not what they do." As Jesus has done, so must we (with the grace of God). Why not resolve to forgive at least one person during these fifty days of Easter?



Matthew 18:21-35

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?"

Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times."