

Forgiveness

WHAT IT IS, WHAT IT ISN'T
& WHY IT MATTERS

Sunday Reflection With Fr. Rafal

Dear St. Joseph Parishioners,

This Sunday's Gospel is about forgiveness. This is the heart of Jesus' message. Forgiveness is essential to our relationship with God - and also to each other. No relationship can last without forgiveness. Every married couple knows that. The same applies to any relationship: two friends, brother and sister, co-workers. To last it takes forgiveness, sometimes daily forgiveness. Forgiveness does not mean putting up with abusive situations, especially when they involve those who are defenseless. Having said that, we must face the central issue in the Gospel: God's forgiveness of us and our forgiveness of each other.

Sometimes people ask me how to forgive. Perhaps a family member or in-law has hurt them. They find themselves thinking about what that person did, even wanting in some way to get back.

When someone tells about a resentment, one of the first things I want to do is to congratulate them - not for their anger, but for recognizing it. It is not easy to recognize resentment, even harder to admit feelings of hatred. Sometimes you hear people say they have let go of ill feelings, that they love everyone - but in the same conversation they mention something a person said to them last year - or twenty years ago. We forget names, we forget birthdays, but we do not forget injuries. We might bury hurts for a time, but they come back. The first step to forgiveness is to acknowledge offenses - what Jesus calls "debts."

People who have deliberately offended do owe a kind of debt. But like the debtor in today's Gospel they are not likely to pay what they owe. So we have a choice: We can put them in jail, that is, cut them off - or we can release them, forgive the debt.

If we choose to forgive, how do we do it? There is only one way: the cross. We have to take our anger, our injuries, our hurts to the cross. The cross brings healing because when we stand before it, we recognize our guilt. If we were the only persons who ever existed, Jesus would have died on the cross to bring forgiveness. Our sins have placed Jesus on the cross.

By recognizing Jesus' forgiveness we can - and we must - forgive those who have offended us. It is not easy. In fact it is the hardest part of following Jesus. You might say: there are people who I do not want to forgive. And there are others who I have forgiven, but the hurt comes back to me at a later date - with full force. I need to forgive a second and a third time. Jesus speaks about forgiving seven times seventy times. Sometimes an offense requires repeated forgiveness. Forgiveness is not easy, but it is the only way to peace. It is the way of Jesus, the way of the cross.

For sure, we Catholics, Christians and all humanity have committed great sins in the past - and we continue to fail. But as we hear today, we need to take our sins to the cross. The fact that Jesus cancelled our debt should inspire us to forgive others.

Have a Blessed Week!

Fr. Rafal Ligenza

St. Joseph Parish Administrator

