

Forgiveness Written in Stone

A story is told of two friends who were walking through the desert. During some point of the journey they had an argument, and one friend slapped the other one in the face. The one who got slapped was hurt, but without saying anything, wrote in the sand, "Today my best friends slapped me in the face."

They kept on walking until they found an oasis, where they decided to take a bath. The one who had been slapped got stuck in the mire and started drowning, but the friend saved him. After he recovered from nearly drowning, he wrote on a stone, "Today my best friend saved my life."

His friend asked him, "After I hurt you, you wrote in the sand and now, you write on a stone, why?" The other friend replied "When someone hurts us we should write it down in sand where the winds of forgiveness can erase it away. But, when someone does something good for us, we must engrave it in stone where no wind can ever erase it."

So real forgiveness keeps on leaving the sins of others and our hurts in the past. Yet Jesus understands the difficulty of such forgiveness. To keep on forgiving is a God-like characteristic. It is contrary to human nature. So He gives a parable beginning in v.23 which will help us obey His commandment to keep on forgiving. (by Stephen Felker from *How Often Should I Forgive?*)

It was [WH Auden](#), who wrote that when grace enters a room everyone begins to dance.

Would this were so! More often the opposite happens, grace enters a room and instead of dancing we become discontent and our eyes grow bitter with envy. Why?

[Nikos Kazantzakis](#), the Greek writer, tells a story of an elderly monk he once met on Mount Athos. Kazantzakis, still young and full of curiosity, was questioning this monk and asked him: "Do you still wrestle with the devil?" "No," replied the old monk, "I used to, when I was younger, but now I've grown old and tired and the devil has grown old and tired with me." "So," Kazantzakis said, "your life is easy then? No more big struggles." "Oh, no!"

replied the old man, "now it's worse. Now I wrestle with God!" "You wrestle with God," replied Kazantzakis, rather surprised, "and you hope to win?" "No," said the old monk, "I wrestle with God and I hope to lose!"

There comes a point in life when our major spiritual struggle is no longer with the fact that we are weak and desperately in need of God's forgiveness, but rather with the opposite, with the fact that God's grace and forgiveness is overly-lavish, unmerited, and especially that it goes out so indiscriminately. God's lavish love and forgiveness apply equally to those who have worked hard and to those who haven't, to those who have been faithful for a long time and to those who jumped on-board at the last minute, to those who have had to bear the heat of the day and to those who didn't, to those who did their duty and to those who lived selfishly.

God's love isn't a reward for being good, doing our duty, resisting temptation, bearing the heat of the day in fidelity, saying our prayers, remaining pure, or offering worship, good and important though these are. God loves us because God is love and God cannot fail to love and cannot be discriminating in love. God's love, as scripture says, shines on the good and bad alike. That's nice to know when we need forgiveness and unmerited love, but it's hard to accept when that forgiveness and love are given to those whom we deem less worthy of it, to those who didn't seem to do their duty. It's not easy to accept the fact that God's love does not discriminate, especially when God's blessings go out lavishly to those who don't seem to deserve them.

Fr. Ron Rolheiser shares a story: when I was first ordained, I lived for a time in one of our Oblate rectories with a semi-retired priest, a wonderfully gracious man, who had been a faithful priest for fifty years. One evening, alone with him, I asked him: "If you had your priesthood to do over again, would you do anything differently?" The answer he gave me was not the one I'd anticipated. "Yes," he said, "I would do some things differently. I'd be easier on people than I was this time. I'd risk the mercy and forgiveness of God more." Then he grew silent, as if to create the proper space for what he was about to say, and added:

Let me say this too: as I get older I'm finding it harder and harder to accept the ways of God. I've been a priest for fifty years and I've been faithful. I can honestly say, in so far as I know, that in my whole life I've never

committed a mortal sin. I've always tried my best and done my duty. It wasn't easy, but I did it with essential fidelity. And you know something? Now that I'm old I'm struggling with all kinds of bitterness and doubt. That's natural, I guess. But what upsets me is that I look around me and I see all kinds of people, young people and others, who've never been faithful, who've lived selfish lives, and they're full of faith and are speaking in tongues! I've been faithful and I'm full of anger and doubt. Tell me, is that fair?"

Deep down we know that God has been more than fair with us, God's lavish generosity to others is something which we find hard to accept.

In his book "The Parables of Grace", Robert Farrar Capon says, "In heaven, there are only forgiven sinners. There are no good guys, no upright, successful types who, by dint of their own integrity, have been accepted - there are only failures.

But in hell, too there are only forgiven sinners..

"The sole difference, therefore between hell and heaven is that in heaven the forgiveness is accepted and passed along, while in hell it is rejected and blocked.

There is only one unpardonable sin, and that is to withhold pardon from others. The only thing that can keep us out of the joy of the resurrection is to join the unforgiving servant in his refusal to forgive."