

## **FR. JOHN'S HOMILY**

**Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Sept. 13, 2020**

To be forgiven and to forgive is a great act of love and compassion. We are blessed to be forgiven by God often: at every Mass we pray "Lord have mercy", (Lesser -venial sins are forgiven) and in Reconciliation we receive the gift of God's healing love through Jesus who takes on and removes all our sins (even the greater- mortal sins).

I pray you also have had the experience of being able to forgive someone in your life. Never do I feel more like Jesus than when opportunities come to allow me to forgive someone that has hurt me or done me wrong. And this is not just about forgiving them, this is allowing Jesus to use your heart to show compassion to a brother or sister.

Many opportunities have come my way in ministry, here I am talking about outside the sacrament of reconciliation. One of my first moments came shortly after I was ordained. In my first assignment, there was a parishioner that felt it was his call to critique me, in the way I celebrated Mass, in my homilies, with suggestions how to improve them. I did not take it well. I had just spent 5 years of intense scrutiny in the seminary. Let's just say, I did not like this man. What bothered me more was giving him Communion and having these feeling in my heart. My spiritual director advised me to pray for him every day. I said. "How long?"; he said "As long as it takes." So every morning and evening I prayed, "Lord help me forgive this man." At first it was hard to say. Then it became routine, but still the same feelings were there when I saw him. Some three months later, it happened during Communion. And by the way, he came to me for Communion every time; he would not go to a lay minister. But this day, unexpectedly when I said, "The Body of Christ", my heart was flooded with love and compassion for this man that I knew was not from within me, but from the one I was holding between us, Jesus. There is no better feeling than to allow Jesus to work in and through your heart; none!

We are called to live the Spiritual and Corporal Works of Mercy; and when we do, we reflect God's presence in the world. Living the Works of Mercy means one is connected to God, to Jesus, and the working of the Holy Spirit. However, in light of our readings today, look at these Spiritual Works of Mercy: to admonish the sinner, bear wrongs patiently, and to forgive offenses willingly. How often have you practiced these Spiritual Works of Mercy?

Again only connected to Jesus can a heart operate in this way. We do not have it in ourselves to forgive others. When is the last time you admonished a sinner? Admonish means to warn or reprimand someone firmly. As parents you must do this quite often with your children/teenagers. It is out of love so that they will learn how to live a better life. As a priest in the Confessional, it is part of our ministry. Admonishing is not to add any guilt or shame upon the person, but just to give warning that these choices you have been making have dire consequences. Take heed and learn to follow the ways of God. Admonishing when done correctly with love and care for the soul of the others, always leads to greater love, joy and inner peace, for the penitent and for the minister.

To bear wrongs patiently, how difficult is this to do? Only with Jesus is this even possible. To be falsely accused, or condemned for something you didn't do. Look at Jesus, falsely condemned; and Jesus only returns forgiveness and love. We can be called a bad name, and look how upset we become. People hurt each other over the most insignificant of

things. And then allow themselves to foster anger and vengeance toward that person until literally it makes them sick. Yes, unforgiven sins can make a person physically sick. Forgiveness heals the heart, heals the person.

To forgive offenses willingly, willingly is the key word here. To forgive willingly, this is who Jesus is, willing at all times to forgive because of His great love. Willingly means a choice or decision in the heart. Why are we are reluctant and slow to forgive? I have a ***Forgiveness Prayer*** by Fr. Bob DeGrandis which I pray often and have encouraged many to pray it has well. (A copy is inserted in this weekend's bulletin and on our website, [www.holysouls.org](http://www.holysouls.org), Bulletin Board.) He is the one I learned that an un-forgiving heart make us physically sick. Forgiving brings healing to heart, mind, body and soul.

Again there is no limit to God's forgiveness and mercy. The other part of this for us as Christians is to forgive as we have been forgiven. When we are unwilling to forgive, continue to hold grudges and bitterness in our hearts, nurture past mistakes and faults of others, and, yes, even when we are unwilling to forgive ourselves for things we have done and said; then in our hearts we put limits on God's love, especially His mercy.

The words of Sirach are words of wisdom today, we need to hear, and our world needs to hear: Wrath and anger are hateful things, yet the sinner hugs them tightly. Why would we want to hug these so tightly? Do we feel in some way, justice has not being served? Ultimately all things will come before the feet of Jesus, all things, and all people. So in the end, justice will happen, in God's way and in God's time. And yet we still cling to anger, and unforgiveness, and in turn expect Jesus to always forgive and show mercy toward us. He does; however there comes a time when Jesus will ask us to go and do likewise. Maybe this is that time!

It came time for Peter to learn about God forgiveness and mercy. Look at the way Jesus responds to Peter in the Gospel. Peter's question is ours also many times. Peter asks, "Lord, if my brother (or sister) sins against me, how often must I forgive? As many as seven times?" (The number seven in the bible is considered the "perfect number" which means, completeness, so Peter must have thought he was being generous in saying 7. He wasn't.) Jesus raises the quota considerably to 77, implying "as many as it takes." We are forgiven over and over; and we are called to forgive others, as many times as it takes.

In teaching Peter and us this perspective, Jesus reveals to us yet again what God is like and how we can and should strive to be. We pray in the Responsorial Psalm for today, "The Lord is kind and merciful, slow to anger and rich in compassion."

As we receive Jesus, who is kind to us, who is full of mercy, who is slow to anger and rich in compassion, we are called to be more like Him: kind, merciful, slow to anger and rich in compassion. Again before we do receive Him, we will pray, "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us". Jesus gave us His prayer, to lead our heart to healing and peace always. Just as I do for you, Jesus says, now I ask you to do the same for your brother and sister.