

FR. JOHN'S HOMILY
Third Sunday of Easter, April 18, 2021

One of my last major conversations I had with my Dad before he died was about regrets. His only big regret was that he wished he would have done more to teach us, his children, about the faith. I told him by his example he was the best teacher for us, the way he served the church. The church was very much a part of my Dad's life, and therefore ours too. We, his family, are still very much active members of the church. There are no perfect parents, but there are some good ones that give good witness to what it means to serve the Lord. Even as I said some encouraging and consoling words to Dad, he still felt like he could have done more. At times I wonder looking back on my life now, or when the time comes for me to leave this world, will there be any regrets? What will be my regrets?

In looking back upon our lives, most of us will find one thing or another that we very much regret. We might remember speaking or acting in ways that hurt others. We might be aware of not doing something that we could have done. Sometimes our past failures, can leave us very burdened. We can find it hard to move on from them; they trouble us and we struggle to be free of them. We can find ourselves going back in memory to them over and over again. The older we get the more we think about these things. What about ourselves, what regrets linger within? What changes do I need to make to help me become a better witness to my Easter Faith?

The first disciples of Jesus must have had regrets after Jesus' crucifixion. During the days of Jesus' final journey, they had all deserted him. They must have had regrets, for on that Good Friday the only apostle that we know was there in the end for Jesus was John. They must have felt a lot of sadness and regret for running away when Jesus needed them the most.

According to Luke's Gospel, however, the first words the Risen Jesus spoke to his disciples were, 'Peace be with you'. Words they did not easily receive from the Lord. They had to know they were forgiven first, in order for peace to enter in. The words of Jesus assured the disciples of His forgiveness. For those first disciples, in their first encounter of the Risen Lord they responded with alarm and fright and thought that they might be seeing a ghost. The Risen Jesus then questioned them, 'Why are you so terrified, and why are these doubts rising in your hearts?' It took the disciples a while to realize that they were forgiven, and they could be at peace.

Forgiveness can be difficult to receive at times. And much more difficult to show toward others, depending upon the hurt. At times we might wonder if we are really forgiven. It is only after the disciples had come to receive this gift of forgiveness that they were sent out as messengers of the Lord's forgiveness. The Risen Lord, having assured them that they were forgiven, went on to commission them to preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins to all the nations. Those who know about God's forgiveness can therefore go out and share God's forgiving love with others.

This is what we find Peter doing in today's First Reading. He declares to the people of Jerusalem that, although they had handed Jesus over to Pilate, God's forgiveness was available to them if they turned to God by believing in Jesus. The church has been faithful to the mission entrusted to the disciples, proclaiming down the centuries the good news that God's forgiveness is stronger than human sin. In raising Jesus from the dead and sending him back to those who had rejected him and failed him, God was declaring that He is a God of great love and forgiveness. There are no sins too large that can't be forgiven. The Risen Jesus reveals a faithful, forgiving God.

Before we can receive the Easter gift of peace, we receive God's forgiveness that comes to us through the Risen Lord. We must first acknowledge our need of that gift. The truth is that we are always in need of the gift of God's forgiveness. Recognizing our need and asking God for the gift of forgiveness is what we call repentance. Again Peter in the First Reading calls on the people of Jerusalem to repent and turn to God so that their sins may be wiped out. The Risen Lord in the Gospel sends out His disciples to preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

The Sacrament of Reconciliation, also known as the Sacrament of Peace or of Mercy, is a gift. A sacred opportunity to admit the truth, to acknowledge our need of God's forgiveness and to ask directly for it. In that sacrament that the Risen Lord says to us, 'Peace be with you'. The words of absolution include the prayer, 'through the ministry of the church may God grant you pardon and peace'.

The first disciples, having received the gift of the Lord's forgiveness, were sent to spread that forgiveness to others. In a similar way, we who receive the same gift are sent out on the same mission. As forgiven sinners we proclaim with our lives the presence of a forgiving and faithful God. We extend to others the gift we have received from the Lord. This is why we need God's divine help, so that we can be more like Jesus.

The Risen Jesus promises His disciples that He would send the Holy Spirit upon them. It is only in the power of the Holy Spirit that they would go out and be faithful to the task of proclaiming the Good News. We need the same Spirit if we are to forgive as we have been forgiven. In the weeks ahead that lead up to the feast of Pentecost, we might pray the prayer, '*Come Holy Spirit, fill my heart and enkindle in me the fire of your love*'. We could pray this prayer especially during those times when we find ourselves struggling to pass on to others the gift of forgiveness that we continue to receive from the Lord. The results of doing so will be a life of few regrets and a whole lot of Peace.

From the time I had that conversation with my Dad on regrets, he had been visited by 7 priests and Bishop McDonald, and he was prayed for and received the anointing of the sick each time. In the end, Dad was at peace. A life of few regrets and whole lot of peace, is what is before us today.