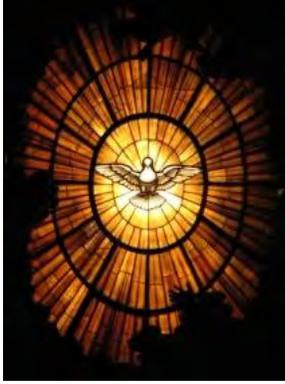


LETTING THE WOUND HEAL



One of my favorite movies is *Manon of the Spring*, a sequel of sorts to *Jean de Florette*, in which a young lady seeks vengeance on the greedy farmers whose callous actions resulted in the death of her father. I cherish a good revenge movie—justice is served! Many a great movie revolves around revenge and vengeance.

Six years ago I pinned to the wall of my office the page of a Sunday reading that touched me as a reminder of how to live my life. It is a reading from Sirach and it is the first reading for Sunday, September 11th: Wrath and anger are hateful things, yet the sinner hugs them tight. (Sirach 27:30)

I have never been the type who sought revenge if I had been wronged. What was the point (more honestly, I wasn't smart enough to pull it off)?

Rather than seek out vengeance I harbored a grudge, simmering on the back burner until the wrongdoer stepped back into my world or whose name rose in conversation. Then the flames under my simmering grudge were turned up a little bit higher.

Many years ago during a weekday mass—where the entire mass is finished inside 25 minutes—the pastor compared harboring a grudge to picking at a scab: you are not allowing the wound to heal. The person who -wronged you is likely unaware that his or her actions were harmful and your unwillingness to forgive serves only to hurt you; your scab isn't healing. In just a three-minute homily Father had illustrated the flaw of the human tendency towards vengeance. Leave the scab alone and let the wound heal.

I was fortunate to instinctively know this but I benefited from reading and rereading Sirach:

Set enmity aside (28:6)

Think of the commandments, hate not your neighbor...and overlook faults (28:7)

Hard to learn and even harder to accept was the band aid of forgiveness.

There is a difference between the semi-passive decision to not seek revenge and the conscious act to forgive someone for that which caused you harm.

Jesus expected us to go beyond seeking an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth (Matthew 5:38) and to go beyond -offer[ing] no resistance to one who is evil. (Matthew 5:39)

From Sirach we are instructed to [f]orgive your neighbor's injustice (28:2) but Jesus expected us to move beyond the single act of forgiving. In today's Gospel reading, Jesus commands us to forgive seventy-seven times (Matthew 18:22). Seventy-seven times!

I cannot begin to fathom what Jesus would have done ten years ago on 9/11. What would Jesus have done as our elected leader?

I imagine that at the very least Jesus would have instructed us to pray: to pray for the victims, to pray for peace, to pray for the souls of the attackers and the masterminds behind the attack, to pray for all Muslims who are connected to the terrorists by the tenuous association of belonging to the same religion.

Could anyone nourish anger against another and expect healing from the LORD? (Sirach 28:3)

(Readings for 24th Sunday of Ordinary Time)



Office of Life, Justice, and Peace