24th Sunday of Ordinary Time

YEAR A – September 13, 2020

This past Friday we remembered the events of 9/11 and prayed for all the people whose lives were changed by the horrific events of that infamous day 19 years ago. As Catholics, we are called by Jesus to forgive the men who did the deed. All the scripture readings today speak to us about the importance of forgiveness. Jesus tells us, if we do not forgive, we will not be forgiven. But how can you forgive people who take the lives of innocent men, women and children in order to further their own misguided goals as those men did on 9/11?

Some years ago, Deacon George called my attention to a prayer that was found on a piece of paper next to the body of a child at the Ravensbruck concentration camp in Germany. Ravensbruck was the largest women's concentration camp in Germany at that time. It was about 50 miles north of Berlin. It's reasonable to assume that the prayer found next to the murdered child was written by a woman, maybe even the mother of the child. As you read the words of this prayer of forgiveness, ask yourself, "Do they have a place in your heart?"

> *"Lord God remember not only the men and women of good-will but also those of ill-will. But do not remember all the suffering they have inflicted on us, remember the fruits we have bought, thanks to this suffering - our comradeship, our loyalty, our humility, our courage, our generosity, the greatness of heart which has grown out of all this, and when they come before you for judgment, let all the fruits that we have borne be their forgiveness."*

Whoever wrote those words, understands the message in the Scripture Readings today. She understands what Jesus means by forgiveness. In the first reading today (Sirach 27:30-28:7), we find these words. "Forgive your neighbors the wrong they have done, and then your sins will be pardoned when you pray". But what if the wrong they have done is unspeakable.

Often I hear people say, "I don't feel like I have forgiven the person who hurt me,.the hurt is just too great..." I remind them of what I was told by an old priest many years ago. Forgiveness is not a feeling, it is an act of the will...it doesn't make the hurt feelings go away, but it helps us to live with them - until they go away.

The fact of the matter is this, there is no healing without forgiveness. Without forgiveness, the anger inside you continues to grow like a deadly poison. The offender begins to live inside your head. The increasing pain can even lead to a desire for revenge. Recall the words attributed to Confucius. "If you seek revenge, begin by digging two graves." Check out Ephesians 4:31- 32, "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other just as, in Christ, God forgave you."

For a few moments in silence, pray the Lord's prayer silently in your mind. Concentrate on the words, especially the part about forgiveness. Is there someone in your life right now, who has hurt you and needs your forgiveness? Granting that forgiveness is the only way for you to find healing.