

Homily for Sunday Mass
July 28, 2019
Year C – Luke 11:1-13
----Father Michael Grant George Cadotte----

A Sunday School teacher had just concluded her lesson and wanted to make sure she had made her point. She said, “Can anyone tell me what you must do before you can obtain forgiveness of sin?” There was a short pause and then, from the back of the room, a small boy spoke up and answered, “Sin.”

Today we are going to take a few moments and explore the nature of forgiveness, but we also have to acknowledge that sin is all around us in this world. And, like our little Sunday School boy pointed out, there seems to be an over abundance of opportunities for us to fall into the grip of sin.

The clear truth is we all sin to varying degrees, severity, and frequency, but at the end of the day we are born into original sin and we carry sinful acts with us in our journeys of life. As I was reminded just yesterday at a baptism right here at Christ the Good Shepherd, it is through the Grace of God in the Sacrament of Baptism we become part of Christ’s church and wash through the mystery of the sacrament away our sins. Before baptism, we are of the world and maybe even of the old law; but when we cross over in baptism, like Joshua leading the people across the Jordan River when God parted it, we cross over into the promised land of salvation where Jesus is there waiting to lead us on our new path in life.

In our second reading, Paul is speaking to a church that is mostly Gentile and he is telling them that the old ways, that is the old methods of entry into the faith – that of circumcision, are no longer required. Paul reminds us all that God, in our baptism, has, “...forgiven us all our transgressions; obliterating the bond against us, with its legal claims, which was opposed to us, he also removed it from our midst, nailing it to the cross” (Col 2:13-14). So, whether it is in baptism or as adults when we pray the Our Father and ask God to, “...forgive us our sins...” (LK 11:4), we are constantly being forgiven by God in our life’s journey. To illustrate this,

A duck hunter was with a friend in the wide-open land of southeastern Georgia. Far away on the horizon he noticed a cloud of smoke. Soon he could hear crackling as the wind shifted. He realized the terrible truth; a brushfire was advancing, so fast they couldn’t outrun it. Rifling through his pockets, he soon found what he was looking for—a book of matches. He lit a small fire around the two of them. Soon they were standing in a circle of blackened earth, waiting for the fire to come. They didn’t have to wait long. They covered their mouths with handkerchiefs and braced themselves. The fire came near—and swept over them. But they were completely unhurt, untouched. Fire would not pass where fire already had passed. Christ came to redeem us from the curse of the Law. The Law cannot judge what Christ has already forgiven. (Zahl)

So, we have established the forgiveness of original sin and need to also look at all the other messy sins that swirl around us all the time. In this we see the perfect example in our first reading as Abraham pleads for forgiveness over Sodom and the Lord sparing tens of thousands for the sake of just a handful of innocents. Here we have the perfect convergence of justice and forgiveness at play.

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Justice and forgiveness. There are times, such as the senseless killing of Tyler Wingate earlier this week, that those two words just cannot co-exist it seems. Our entire parish community mourns with Tyler's family and sends our prayers of support and love. And while we all seek justice in this horrific and senseless death, we also must be careful not to allow our righteous sense of justice to morph into vengeance and in itself become a sin. We should hold offenders accountable, but we must also, as Christians, practice temperance and forgiveness as we ask others to forgive our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. I am concerned on this latter point as our national program of state sponsored killing is seeing a new rebirth especially when fair and equal justice in our criminal system is not always fair or equal and thus un-just.

I am reminded of the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant, in which a freed slave who does not forgive the debts of another is thrown into jail to be tortured. Jesus concludes this story with a less-than-comforting moral, "So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart" (Matthew 18:35).

For myself, prayer is a comforting act that I practice daily in my life – I hope and pray you do as well. And when praying we ask God for so many things, but I find the hardest to even think about is that of forgiveness of those that wrong me. It is not an easy act but one we are called to do and for that we must pray as well; pray that God will soften our stony hearts. The best way to move to a life of increased love and forgiveness is through prayer. Jesus was always praying and was doing so when he was asked how we should pray. He then, through parable, told us to be persistent and keep at it. Don't back away but keep your petitions constantly in your prayers. Just like the friend in the middle of the night and those that knock and receive, seek and find, we too can find heaven here on earth with our love of God, repentance of our sins and forgiveness of those who sin against us.

AMEN

---Citations---

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