

24th Sunday in Ordinary Time A 2020

With all these things happening around us, it seems that our year 2020 has gone from bad to worse. Instead of having that 2020 vision that I shared to you at the beginning of the year, our vision has been blurred with all the bad things that are happening around us – the Pandemic, the social unrest and now, the wildfires affecting us. We need to continue praying for the end of these challenges; we need to continue praying for encouragement and strength to overcome them and yes, we need to continue praying for calm and relief to our tired bodies, our worried minds, and our anxious spirit. With no particular ending in sight, we ask ourselves: “Where can we find that peace and security we need to sustain us at these difficult times?”

Our readings today give us the answer: we can find them in God’s compassion and mercy. A friend of mine shared to me an experience of one his parishioners who just lost her home from the fire in Southern Oregon. His parishioner could not believe that most of the things that she had worked hard for many years just vanished in an instant. How devastating and painful it is for her to see those things gone but she realized in the end, that it is only in God where she can truly find her ultimate security. Despite of what she lost, she finds peace and comfort at this time from God’s abiding presence and love for her. What an amazing faith she has! If it is somebody else on her shoes, that person could have probably asked God, “Why? Why me? Why now? Where are you?” But she is at peace despite of her loss because she believes in God’s compassion and love. That no matter what happened, God has continued to keep her safe and God will ultimately help her to come back and rise again from the ashes.

I hope that we can find inspiration on her story and experience as we face our own struggles and challenges as well at this time. When we feel overwhelmed with what are happening around us, let us remember her trust and confidence in God despite of what had happened to her. Now, these challenges we face take its toll on us. They have been hard for me and I know they are to you as well. They affect all of us in one way or another. I often tell those who come to me for confession to be aware of the situations when they feel tired, stressed, and devastated because we easily fall into sin on these moments. During these times, our fuses are short. We become impatient and negative toward others. We tend to hurt and offend others with our words and actions. And so, with all these things happening around us, the call for reconciliation is so appropriate and timely because it is only in loving and being loved, in forgiving and being forgiven that we can experience the peace and solace we are looking for at this time.

My grandfather just died a few days ago. He has been sick for a while. Just as I have some misunderstandings with my Dad, my Dad has his own share of disagreement with him. We are both first-borns, so we have our power struggles with our fathers. Now, I talked with my Dad when my grandfather was about to die. They were able to bid goodbye and asked for reconciliation from each other for all the things they may have done or said that hurt each other. The opportunity for him to reconcile and be reconciled, to forgive and be forgiven, to love and be loved at that moment brought a peaceful death to my grandfather. He was able then “to sleep in peace.”

In light of this, we need to forgive and be reconciled with one another. Harboring old grudges is pointless and we do not need to wait for the last moment to be reconciled with one another. The forgiveness that we offer others is the indispensable condition for us to experience peace in our lives. Can you recall the time when you have had a misunderstanding with your spouse? Or a bad

argument with your parent or a loved one? Can you recall the time when you have been angry towards your workmate or you felt slighted and hurt by your neighbor? Were you able to sleep peacefully at night? Do you feel comfortable at home or at your work during that time? NO, right? These practical examples show us that we really need forgiveness and reconciliation to experience peace in our lives.

So, Peter's question resonates within us: "How often should I forgive?" Jesus' answer comes in the form of an idiom, "seventy times seven times," which means, always and in all places – to forgive more – never less. In the Jewish tradition during the time of Jesus, you can forgive your brother or sister three times and that would be enough. But Peter wanted to take it a notch higher, so he asked, seven times? Seven is a perfect number so it would be a perfect number of times to forgive. But Jesus said, seventy times seven – that's what, 490? Well, I'm bad with Math so let us just say numerous or countless times. And rightly so because in forgiving, we do not need to keep scores. It is not about who wins or who loses; it is not about who gives more and who receives less; it is about being the Christ to each other. We must forgive each other constantly in our lives just as Christ has forgiven us. As Christ has forgiven us so many times in our lives, we must do the same for our brothers and sisters.

For this reason, we must be intentional in our effort to be reconciled with another no matter how hard it is for us. Yes, we may never forget the hurt we have experienced, but we can, with God's grace, choose to forgive and pray for our offenders. Forgiveness allows us to move beyond the pain, the resentment, and the anger in our lives. When we forgive, we make the choice that heals. When we withhold forgiveness, we remain the victim. Forgiveness changes us from being a prisoner of our hurts to a person who is free, at peace with God, with others, and with ourselves. Amen.