



Some reflections inspired by online copyrighted commentaries and homilies

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Twenty -Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

It might seem that the beginning and ending of today's gospel address different issues. But they don't. The beginning offers a specific process for reconciling with a brother or sister who has offended you. The ending is Jesus' beautiful promise, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." The beginning is about forgiveness, and the ending concerns Jesus' presence. But when we place these two parts together, we realize that the gospel is telling us that it is in the presence of Christ that we become able to forgive.

This little story might help us to understand. Tommy, Marty, and Sam were brothers. They were close to each other in age. Tommy was seven; Marty was eight; and Sam was nine. They were generally good brothers to each other, but they had their moments. One day they had a fierce argument over a video game. There were shouts and accusations over whose game it was, who was able to play it, and who could get lost. Their parents did their best to calm the situation, but the three boys went to sleep that night still angry at each other. Around two in the morning a huge storm passed through the area. The house was repeatedly shaken by loud peals of thunder. The boys' father came to check on them. But when he opened their bedroom door, they were not to be seen. Somewhat concerned, he called out, "Boys, where are you?" A small voice responded, "We are all in the closet, forgiving each other."

When something shakes us, we become ready to forgive. When we have been hurt, it hardens us. The pain and anger which comes from the offense becomes a focus in our lives. "How could she have said that to me? How could he treat me that way after all I did for him? Who does she think she is?" We lose sleep. We plan how to get even. Our hurt controls us. Forgiveness is out of the question. But when thunder strikes, when something shakes us, we become able to see that there are more important things than our hurt. People who realize that death is near want to get things in order. They often reach out to make peace with those who have hurt them. People who experience deep loss or failure often lose the energy to hold onto a grudge. The blow they receive softens them for forgiveness. When life humbles us, we become ready to reconcile with those who have offended us.

Today's gospel tells us that we can be humbled not only by tragedy and loss but also by Christ's love. We can be shaken not only by thunder but by the enormity of God's grace. If we become aware of how much we have been given, how deeply we have been blessed, it humbles us. When we remember how fortunate we are to have our health, our children, our job, our friends, it can loosen our hurt and our grievance towards others.

Christ's love for us can shake us. When we are gathered in his name and he is with us, that love is deep enough and strong enough to change us. Yes, we have been hurt. Yes, we still bear the wounds of ingratitude and rejection. But when we gather in Christ's presence, his love is greater than our pain. When we are shaken by what he has done for us, it is not time to hold a grudge. It is time to huddle together and start forgiving each other.