

Fr Ryan Homily 9/13/20

Read: Sirach 27:30-28:7; Psalm 103:1-4,9-12; Romans 14:7-9; Matthew 18:21-35

Today the Gospel and the first reading, of course, are about forgiveness and I think I've talked about forgiveness more than just about any other topic over the years and the readings do focus on it a lot. Because it's hard, isn't it? It's hard for people to forgive. I mean, look at how fast the man in this parable today goes from forgiven to being called wicked. And the reason he's called wicked by almighty God is that he didn't forgive, and that same thing can make any one of us wicked. Who'd ever think about ourselves being wicked? But if we refuse to forgive, we can become wicked. And so, think about how often we hold our grudges and our unforgiveness. We might have unforgiveness toward each other. Someone might have unforgiveness towards me, or me towards you, or within a family, or within neighbors. And this unforgiveness it fills our life and it just destroys it. It destroys our communities. It destroys our families. Forgiveness is that which opens up reconciliation and it brings healing. But it's very, very hard to do, we know that. And still having or harboring unforgiveness, this is the best way I've ever heard anyone put it, is like drinking poison hoping the other person dies. Harboring unforgiveness is like drinking poison hoping the other person dies. It just doesn't work. When we have unforgiveness in our heart it destroys us. One of my favorite stories about forgiveness comes from a woman named Corrie ten Boom, I'm not sure if you've heard of her, but she was arrested by the Nazi's and spent a long time in a prisoner of war camp. And later in life she wrote about her life in a book called *The Hiding Place* and she actually has written a lot of books. But I just want you to hear from her, in Corrie's own words. I'm going to read a passage to you from this book because we all struggle to forgive, and she did too. And maybe just for this part close your eyes and let her words take you to this moment when she had to forgive. And this is what she does. She says, "I was in a church in Munich when I saw him. I saw this man and it was 1947 and I had returned from Holland to Germany now defeated with the message that God forgives. The solemn faces stared back at me not quite daring to believe that God would forgive. There was never questions after a talk in Germany in 1947. People stood up in silence and in silence collected their wraps, in silence left the room.

And it was after this talk that I saw him working his way forward against the others. One moment I saw the overcoat and the brown hat. The next, a blue uniform and a visored cap with its skull and crossbones. It came back in a rush. The huge room with its harsh overhead lights. The pathetic pile of dresses and shoes in the center of the floor. The shame of all of us walking naked in front of this man. I could see Betsie my little sister's frail form ahead of me ribs sharp against her parchment skin. Betsie and I were arrested as children for concealing Jews in our home during the Nazi occupation of Holland. This man was one of our guards at Ravensbrück concentration camp where we were sent. Now, here was this man in front of me and he put his hand out to me. And he said, a fine message too freundin. How good it is to know that you say all our sins are at the bottom of the sea. I, who had spoken so glibly about forgiveness, fumbled in my pocket with my watch rather than take that hand. He would not remember me, of course, I was one prisoner among a thousand women, but I remembered him and the leather crop swinging from his belt. I was face to face with one of my captures; my blood seemed to freeze. You mentioned Ravensbrück in your talk, he was saying, I was a guard there. No, he did not remember me. But since that time, he went on, I have become a Christian and I know that God has forgiven me for the cruel things I did there. But I would like to hear it from your lips as well freundin. And again, his hand came out to me- will you forgive me? I stood there. I who's sins had again and again been forgiven by God and could not forgive. Betsie, my sister, died in that place. Could he erase her slow, terrible death simply by asking for forgiveness? I could've been only seconds that he stood there holding out his hand, but it seemed to me like hours as I wrestled with the most difficult thing I have ever had to do. And I knew that I had to do it- I knew it! The message that God forgives has a prior condition. That we forgive those who have hurt us. If we do not forgive men their trespasses, says Jesus, neither will your Father forgive you yours. I know it's not only a Commandment of God but it's a daily experience. Since the end of the war I had a home in Holland for victims of Nazi brutality. Those who were able to forgive their former enemies were able to return to the outside world and rebuild their lives no matter what the physical scars. Those who nursed their bitterness remained invalids. It was a simple and as horrible as that. And still, I stood there with the coldness clutching my heart, but forgiveness is not an emotion, I knew that too. Forgiveness is an act of the will and that will can function regardless of how I feel. HELP, I prayed silently. At least

I can lift my hand, I can do that much. God, you supply the feeling. And so, woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started down my shoulder, raced down my arm and sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being bringing tears to my eyes. I forgive you my brother with all my heart. For a long moment we grasped each other's hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. I have never known God's love so intensely as I did then." That was some of Corrie ten Boom's story in her own words. All of us, of course, have a choice. It's a choice to forgive, it's not a feeling, and we have to make that act of the will if we're not going to be called wicked by God. And so, I want us to just take this moment here in church and think of anyone who has hurt you. And from your heart say Jesus I forgive them and I ask you to forgive them. Jesus, I forgive them and I ask you to forgive them. Because remember when we continue on with this mass today, right before we receive communion, together we're gonna say the Lord's Prayer. And we will say to almighty God forgive me my trespasses as I forgive those who trespass against me. So, we will tell God at this mass God if I forgive, then forgive me. If I will not forgive, then do not forgive me. Let's be a people who forgive.

Amen