

## Forgive and you will be Forgiven

7<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year C

By: Fr. David

Today Jesus continues the same sermon that he began last week in Luke's Gospel. Jesus has just started his public ministry and a crowd has followed him to a grassy valley in the hills of Galilee and he begins to teach them what the life of a true follower of his looks like. Last week he said blessed are the poor, the hungry, the persecuted, and the sorrowful. A very counterintuitive blessing, indeed. But that just sets the stage for the counterintuitive teaching that comes today. Today Jesus lays out the attitude required of his followers in relation to their enemies. The intuitive response would be to hate your enemies. After all they are your enemies, and I am sure they didn't become that by being nice to you. No, an enemy is someone who has hurt you, apposed you, and in some way taken something from you. So it is intuitive to hate, to wish they got their comeuppance, to wish that they were punished. But Jesus says that we must love our enemies. He says that we must forgive them. And he even goes so far as to say that we will not be forgiven if we don't.

I've always found that interesting, that we will not be forgiven if we don't forgive. At one level it doesn't make sense to me. If someone hurts me, how am I in the wrong for not forgiving? I'm the victim. And yet I'm going to get punished, for staying angry about something I have every right to be angry about. He hurt me. Why is my forgiveness so important? After all, isn't God's forgiveness all that matters if I want to get to heaven.

Well it's true that God's forgiveness is all that ultimately matters to get to heaven, but we can't forget that God can forgive even our enemies.

Imagine this. You and an acquaintance open a business together. For the first couple of months everything goes well. However, after a while the money stops flowing in. You don't have enough customers to sustain the venture and you will go bankrupt soon. You also start to see some inconstancies in the bookkeeping. That's when you realize that your business partner has been taking money for himself and hiding it. As your company and your lively hood are about to go under, you confront him, and he denies it. Finally, the company goes bankrupt and you lose everything. You try to take your business partner to court but you have no evidence. This man just ruined your business and possibly your life and he is going to get away with it. I think that most people in that situation would say, "I hate that man."

Now imagine you hold onto the grudge till the end of your life, and then finally when you die you are greeted by St. Peter at the gates of heaven. St. Peter see's that your name is on the list and invites you to come in. But that's when, looking through the purely gates, you see HIM.

The man that ruined your life is in heaven. How did he get in there? Didn't God know that he was a bad man. Didn't God know that he deserved punishment?

St. Peter explains to you that God knew all those things, but on the last day of his life this man had a conversion. He regretted all the wrong he had done, and like the good thief that was crucified beside Jesus, he died asking God to forgive him. God is merciful, and he will not deny anyone who comes to him seeking forgiveness no matter how late.

And now you stand there on the threshold of heaven unable to take a step in. Though God has forgiven this man, you have not. You want to be in heaven, but not with him. The only thing that keeps you from eternal happiness is your hate.

Now, whether the entrance to heaven is actually like that – whether St. Peter is really there, it doesn't matter. But I do think the reason why Jesus put so much emphases on our forgiveness of enemies is he knew that many of our enemies would make it to heaven. So if we held onto our grudges then we won't want to be in heaven.

Now think of those who've hurt you, those who've really hurt you, and ask yourself, "would you be fine spending eternity with them?" To be sure, they will have to be different to make it into heaven. All their faults will have to be fixed before they could make it. Even their attitude toward you will be changed. They will want

your forgiveness. But even then, is there someone who you are not sure that you would want to see? If not, then Jesus' command is for you. It may take some time, forgiveness can be a process it doesn't happen overnight. But I fear that sometimes that process is left undone, and we never experience the healing that can come from it.

When Jesus preached his sermon to his followers on the grassy valley in Galilee, he was showing them the pathway to heaven, and one of its paving stones was forgiveness.