

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Forgiveness is something we frequently yearn to receive, yet frequently hesitate to grant. When we say the wrong thing and hurt someone we love, we often wish we could press an undo button and take back the words. But, what's done is done, and it often takes more words, more carefully chosen, and new actions giving proof of change to push reset on a relationship.

When someone has said the wrong thing to us, we may hesitate to forgive. Their words and actions have told us more than we knew and make us reassess who the person is and what kind of relationship we want with them.

Forgiving is hard because it involves emotions and opens questions. However, when your love for someone is sufficiently strong, forgiveness becomes part of the relationship and even binds two people together more closely. Forgiveness may come with some discipline attached, as when parents correct their children, but forgiveness does come.

In our dealings with God, we believe we have that kind of loving relationship. When we sin, we ask forgiveness, and we receive it. Sometimes that forgiveness comes with discipline, but it does come.

Our passage today from the Letter to the Hebrews affirms this belief. As we heard in recent weeks, the writer of this letter compares Jesus Christ to the high priests of the old covenant. Those priests entered the sanctuary once a year on the Day of Atonement and offered in sacrifice the blood of an animal. They did this repeatedly because we humans sin repeatedly.

Jesus, however, entered a different sanctuary on a different timetable with different blood. The sanctuary of the high priests was a copy or image of the one in heaven, but Jesus entered heaven itself. The high priests offered sacrifice each year, but Jesus did it once for all. The high priests offered the blood of some animal, but Jesus offered his own blood. Christ possesses a firm, lasting, eternal love for us, and he doesn't have to show it year after year. It's just there. The Letter to the Hebrews says, as we humans die once, so the single death of Christ took away the sins of many. And just as we await judgment after we die, so Christ "will appear a second time... to bring salvation to those who eagerly await him."

We can rely on the forgiveness of God, but we ought not take advantage of his love. Because we know God forgives, we may more easily slip into sin. Oftentimes, having sinned once, we figure, well, might as well do it again—I'm already in sin, what's one more? Indeed, some people planning to confess their sins realize they have committed some sins out of presumption, knowing they can always be forgiven.

Such thinking uncovers more about who we are. We are weak human beings who love God, but not as fully as God loves us. We follow our own designs rather than those God places before us.

Many of our sins result from taking advantage of people we love. We sometimes misbehave more at home because of presumption: We presume our family will forgive us. That does not give us a license to misbehave. Love calls us to higher standards—to forgive those who offend us and to minimize our actions that need to be forgiven.