

HOMILY ~ 24th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME SEPTEMBER 16/17, 2023

I have been thinking a lot about 9-11 this week. It really changed our lives forever. It is hard to believe that it was 22 years ago. Our younger generation was not even born when all that happened. I remember at the time that people flocked to church. When our lives seemed out of control, we turned to God. But that was not the case with everyone. I was reading about a Christian woman who said she was unable to go to church because she knew what Jesus commands us about forgiveness, and she was not ready for that. We must forgive not 7 but 77 times. She said, *"It will be some time before I will want to be with Jesus."* The readings last week and this week were all about forgiveness. We were in the same lectionary cycle in 2001, year A, as we are today, so the readings at the time would have been the same. I wonder how many of us are still unable to forgive.

In the Gospel Reading today, we hear about the King who forgave a huge debt owed by one of his servants. When the servant refused to forgive a much smaller debt, he changed his mind and took away the forgiveness. I noticed two things about the parable. First, the two debtors were unable to repay the debt. That is true most of the time when someone hurts us. They cannot repay the debt. We cannot change the past. The second thing I noticed was that once the king decided to forgive the debt of his servant, he could change his mind. Forgiveness is a process. There are times when we think we forgive; and then something happens or you ruminate about it or remember something else that happened, and you have to forgive again.

Forgiveness does not mean that we are excusing the wrong, it does not mean that what the individual did was ok, it does not mean that we need to forget and it does not mean that we need to let someone continue to hurt us. Forgiveness involves putting aside the anger and resentment, that wanting to get even. We cannot change the past so our choice is to forgive or be controlled by the past hurt today. As a result of 9-11, there was a lot of prejudice and discrimination against Muslim Americans

and immigrants in general. These individuals had done nothing wrong. I think because we could not forgive, we wanted to get even; and since we could not as individuals get back at those who were responsible, we lashed out at innocent individuals. That happens sometimes when we cannot get back at the person who hurt us, we can lash out at innocent bystanders. There are many negative consequences for failure to forgive. I like to say, forgiveness is the gift you can give yourself.

There was a study done at the University of Windsor where they studied 66 recovering alcoholics. All 66 had one thing in common. They were all angry with someone who they were unable to forgive. Now alcoholism is a complex disease, and I do not mean to imply that it is always the result of a failure to forgive; but the anger that results from failure to forgive is unpleasant enough that you may want to cover it up with alcohol. In fact, studies have shown that failure to forgive results in resentment, bitterness, hostility, hatred, residual anger, fearfulness, depression and anxiety. A study done at John Hopkins concluded that your health depends upon forgiveness. They found that forgiveness lowers the risk of heart attack, improves cholesterol levels, reduces blood pressure and levels anxiety, depression and stress.

So, is there someone you need to forgive? Remember it is a process. You may need to sit with the anger for a little while before you can let it go, but let it go. I have had people ask me, *“You do not expect me to let them get away with it do you?”* and my response is, *“They already have, and they cannot change the past.”* You may be making yourself sick, or you may be lashing out at innocent bystanders. So forgive, it is the gift you can give yourself.

Love and Peace,

Fr. Jim