

HOMILY 24TH SUN OT YRA 2017

I think we are still really focused upon the disaster of the recent hurricanes. The goodness that God brought from the disasters is the way people came together to help one another. I saw on the news a woman who was stranded, surrounded by water and unable to get to safety. There was no boat or flotation device available. The people there decided that they could make a human chain and holding on to one another they could rescue her, which they did. And I saw the chain. It was people of different ages, colors, ethnicity. It did not look like anyone was concerned about the group they people belonged to. It was just human beings helping other human beings because they were human beings. I wonder why we have to have a disaster to figure out that it is not us and them. It is just us.

The readings today are all about forgiveness. Actually, I think there is a step before forgiveness. The first step I think is to ask if there is anything to forgive. I think that is at least in part what prejudice or discrimination is about. If we are prejudice against or discriminate against a whole group of people, we are probably blaming them for something. If we are blaming whole groups of people for terrorism, taking American jobs, causing violence or crime, that blame is probably misplaced. There may be individuals who are to blame, but blaming a whole group is irrational.

In the Gospel reading we hear that we must forgive all of the time. Forgiveness is not easy. Just ask Jesus. He had to die on the cross for our forgiveness. But we must forgive all of the time as Jesus forgives. In the Gospel parable a huge debt is owed to the king. When they talk about a huge debt here they are talking about millions of dollars. First of all, is the debtor to blame? We cannot really tell from the parable, but I can give you a real life example of how this could happen without blame. There are people in this country who are millions of dollars in debt because they received needed medical treatment and did not have insurance because they could not afford it or it was not available to them or they were insured but the insurance company would not pay. They are legally responsible, but are they

to blame? We need to stop blaming and fix our health care system. This is not a political game. Our congress men and women need to work together and solve the problem. Let's say that the individual is to blame for the debt. Selling the individual, his wife and children and his property would have been the acceptable resolution to the problem at that time, but it is not going to satisfy the debt. The king can destroy a whole family and the debt remains unpaid. Maybe forgiving and help the family makes much more sense. We have an opioid addiction crisis in our country today. We are still sending people to jail because they are addicted. And we now know that drug addiction is a disease. We would not think of sending people to jail because they have cancer or diabetes or heart disease. Maybe we need to send them for treatment and help them rather than punishing them.

And sometimes there are things to forgive. We have to forgive everyone, I mean everyone. If we cannot forgive we are operating out of anger and a desire to punish or get even. That will never solve the underlying problem. Forgiveness is not easy, but I look at it as the gift you can give yourself. I was reading about Kenneth Hart, a psychology professor at the University of Windsor in Ontario. He studied 66 recovering alcoholics. He found one thing they all had in common. They were all angry with someone. He worked with them and helped them to forgive. He found that forgiveness gave them one less reason to relapse. One of the individuals said this: "Forgiveness is more for yourself than for the person you are forgiving. For me to forgive that person sets me free."

So are you blaming someone for something that is not their fault? Are you blaming someone and punishing them when you should be helping them? Is there someone that you need to forgive so that you can be set free? Pray about it.