

HOMILY 24TH Sunday in Ordinary Time

September 13, 2020

I was reading a story about a man from the Netherlands who was raised in a dysfunctional family, did not get along with his siblings, had a bad marriage, was cheated by his business partner and lost all of his money. He went to the doctor because he was quite sick. The doctor told him that he had about six months to live because his body was just worn out. The doctor knew that his patient had anger issues. The doctor told him that he needed to let all of that anger go. The man decided to make a list of all the people he needed to forgive. There were 39 people on his list. Over the next 6 months he contacted all of these individuals in person or by phone, asked for forgiveness and forgave them. He went back to the doctor after 6 months and he was symptom free. It was all that anger that he held inside because of his failure to forgive that made him sick.

In the Gospel reading, we heard a parable about a king who demonstrated extravagant forgiveness. The king represents God. God demonstrated this extravagant forgiveness to us. God loves us unconditionally all of the time and always forgives us. Jesus came into the world 2,000 years ago to suffer and die for the sins we had not even committed yet. Jesus forgives us in advance before we have even committed the offense. That is how extravagant God's love and forgiveness is. Now when the debtor who was forgiven the huge amount was unable to forgive someone indebted to him for a much smaller amount, the King withdraws his forgiveness of the debt and puts that individual in prison until he pays back the full amount. Now how is he ever going to repay the debt from prison? I want to suggest to you that when we fail to forgive, we put ourselves in a prison. God still forgives us. He

forgave us before we committed the offense. But God cannot heal us of our anger until we forgive. Just like the man from the Netherlands, he made himself sick and could not be healed until he forgave. When we fail to forgive, we make ourselves sick spiritually, emotionally and physically. Forgiveness is the gift we can give ourselves.

Sometimes people tell me that they are waiting for the person who harmed them to apologize and make things right before they forgive. First of all, the person who hurt you has frequently gone on with their lives. They do not care that you have not forgiven them; it is you that is making yourself sick. Secondly, the person that hurt you cannot make things right. They cannot change the past. They cannot pay the debt. It is up to us to forgive the debt. It has nothing to do with the other person. Say you come to me and say: "Fr. Jim, you owe me a million dollars and I expect you to pay me back the full amount." I respond: "yes I do owe you a million dollars and I will send you a check when I get a million dollars." You spend all week waiting by the mailbox for your check. After a week, when no check arrives you call me and say: "Fr. Jim, you owe me a million dollars and I expect you to pay me back the full amount." I respond: "yes I do owe you a million dollars and I will send you a check when I get a million dollars." Let me tell you. I will never have a million dollars. I will never be able to pay back what I owe you. So now you have a choice to make. You can forgive the debt and go on with your life or you can spend the rest of your life waiting by the mailbox. That is what happens when we fail to forgive. We allow something that happened in the past to control our present and future. You are waiting for a debt to be repaid that can never be repaid. You will also be making yourself sick in the process.

Forgiveness does not mean you must forget, it does not mean that what the person did to you was ok; it does not mean that there is no debt, it does not mean that you need to continue to let the person hurt you. It does mean that you need to forgive the debt and let go of the anger and resentment. Forgiveness is the gift you can give yourself.