

Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time
February 24, 2019
Fr. Rick Lorenz

Reflection

I visit the elementary schools within our parish each week. Last year we talked about baptism and the saints. This year we spoke about the Eucharist. Now we've begun to speak about the sacrament of reconciliation. I'll follow up by hearing the confessions of grades three, four and five. I begin by talking about the minister and the recipient. Priests and bishops can hear confessions by Catholics and Orthodox Christians (if their pastor approves). Next comes form and matter. The words of absolution are the form of the sacrament. The sins they bring to God are the matter; just as water, bread and wine are the matter of baptism and the Eucharist. I explain the seal of confession, go through the rite, and tell them how to prepare: by examination of conscience. Here they recall their sins, being guided by the Ten Commandments, which Jesus perfected on the Sermon on the Mount. The grade three class at St. James inspired me by their interest; their questions and answers. A young theologian said, "We're too young to have killed anyone, but we kill lots of people in video games." Huh! I said that it's not really the same. But it does point to the delight we take in hurting others when punishing evil, even if it's just imaginary. And this existed even before video games. We used to shoot cap guns and have sword fights with sticks. We find this delight in books and movies.

1 Sam 26:2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-25
Ps 103
1 Cor 15:45-49
Lk 6:27-38

I guess our stories steel us for a hard world, but a hardened heart is insensitive and numb. Jesus gave us the Sermon on the Mount to convert our hearts, because that is where we choose good or evil; it's where we grow in virtue; it's where we begin to imitate God, the Father of mercies (1968). So he says, "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you."

Jesus is asking us to forgive as he did. He would even implore forgiveness from the cross (Lk 23:34). But "from his conception, Christ's humanity is filled with the Holy Spirit (504)." Can we measure up to that standard? Is there a precedent?

In today's first reading, David is given an opportunity to see Saul slain. But he says, "Do not destroy him; for who can raise his hand against the Lord's anointed, and be guiltless?" David shields his enemy Saul, and then receives his blessing. It doesn't end the conflict between them. If reconciliation was sought, it was not found. David spared Saul because he was anointed by God; just as he was (1 Sam 10:1, 16:13). This king chosen by God, even though rejected by God (1 Sam 15:26), was afforded mercy.

We cannot know whether David forgave Saul in the depths of his heart. They did share a history of violence mingled with love; betrayal and admiration; jealousy and failure.

But Jesus would say, "love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return." David loved Saul with risk, did good to God's anointed, and lent him life through mercy. When Saul died, David had this lamentation: "Thy glory, O Israel, is slain upon thy high places! How the mighty are fallen (2 Sam 1:19)!" David was imitating God's mercy through an impulse of the Holy Spirit, who also gave him these words from the psalm: "He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities." And David would come to need mercy too, leading to further understanding: "My sacrifice, O God, is a contrite spirit; a contrite, humbled heart, O God, you will not scorn (Ps 51:17)."

David spared Saul because he was anointed. We are all anointed at baptism, in serious illness, and when beginning to discern our vocation at confirmation; priests are anointed at ordination. But the apostle to the gentiles expands the scope of forgiveness (1935). "Just as we have borne the image of the one of dust, we will also bear the image of the one of heaven." All are created in the image and likeness of God, so "be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."

We forgive because Jesus tells us to. "Forgive, and you will be forgiven." We know it, and so we choose to forgive. But it can be hard to forgive in the depths of our heart, even though "a good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put in your lap." We remember past hurt, and might expect more to come.

There are three things we can do. First, pray for the person whom we need to forgive (2647). Second, remember some good they have brought into our lives. Third, trust in the Holy Spirit to effect forgiveness in our hearts; over time; as we grow in wisdom and understanding. The Holy Spirit purifies the memory, transforming hurt into intercession. He also turns injury into compassion, because it's within the depths of the heart that everything is bound and loosed (2842, 2843). By the power of the Holy Spirit, God limits evil on earth through our forgiveness; and proves that his endless love is greater than our sin (2844).