

Homily (24th Sunday of Ordinary Time) – 9/17/2017

“Holding onto anger is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die.” Those words are attributed to Nelson Mandela. Mark Twain said the same thing in another way. He said, “Anger is like acid that corrodes a vessel that contains it.” Now why do we hold onto anger? Maybe we don’t forgive. And why don’t we forgive, because we could have false ideas about forgiveness. In this homily, we will give ten ideas what forgiveness is and is not.

But the first false idea is to think we can overlook today’s gospel. In the parable, Jesus is saying forgiveness by God is not like a Christmas present that a kindly grandfather gives to a sulky child who has not bought a single gift for anyone else. Jesus is saying forgiveness by God is not like the meal that will be waiting for you back home even if you have failed to buy a sandwich or cup of coffee for a homeless person. Rather, he is saying forgiveness is more like the air in your lungs. There is room for you to inhale the next lungful only after you have exhaled. If you resist exhaling you will not be able to take in any more air and you will suffocate. Our lungs are either open or closed.

The same way with forgiving a brother or sister from the heart. If our heart is open to forgiving and willing to forgive others, it will be open to receive God’s love, and forgiveness. But if it is closed to the one, it will be closed to the other. And, you know in the gospel parable we just heard. The servant who owed ten thousand talents, do you know how much that is in today’s money. It is equal to 500 million dollars. That is a lot of dollar bills. Still the master gave him a pass. Yet, that servant, that guy who got the debt forgiven he had someone owing him a hundred dinar. Do you know how much that is in today’s money, \$500 dollars. Yet, he did not give the other guy a pass.

That parable is about you and me. We were given a 500 million dollar debt of forgiveness by God. Now who owes you \$500 dollars in forgiveness and you are going to leave this building refusing to forgive for a lousy \$500 dollars?

Okay let’s clear up some false ideas about what forgiveness is and is not. These ideas are taken from a priest who works full time in the ministry of forgiveness. They can be applied to almost any relationship, though marriage is complicated.

- 1) True or false. Anger has no place in forgiveness.*

False. Anger is what you feel when you are hurt and what you are getting past when you do forgive.

2) True or false: When you forgive, you forget. That is false. God can forgive and forget, but not humans beings. If it was slight hurt, maybe, forgive and forget. But a deep hurt, that takes time. Even Jesus can't forget his wounds. He tells Thomas put your hands in my wounds. In between Good Friday crucifixion and Easter Sunday Resurrection, there is a sad and grieving Holy Saturday that might go on for years.

3) True or false: To forgive means letting person back into your life. False. You can forgive someone yet it is not safe to be around that person.

4) True or false Forgiveness is reconciliation. False. You don't need an apology to forgive someone. You do need an apology to reconcile with someone. Forgiveness is a one way street, reconciliation is a two way street.

5) True or false: Forgiveness is putting up with behavior that is disrespectful and hurtful to you. False. That would be masochistic which means you enjoy pain.

6) True or false: Forgiveness means confronting person with your anger and telling them they hurt you. False. That easily shifts into blame. Anyhow anger attaches you to a person, do you really want to be close to a person who habitually disrespects you?

7) True or false: Forgiveness is a decision not to get even with a person. True, and not to gossip either. Gossip is the most unconfessed serious sin.

8) True or false: Forgiveness means accepting person warts and all. False. Acceptance is not forgiveness. We can accept someone as a bully, they are who they are doesn't mean you accept their bullying.

9) True or False : Forgiveness is about justice. False. Justice is about righting a wrong, forgiveness is about healing a hurt. I know a man who is suing the builder of his house. They both belong to the same parish church. He forgives the builder, also suing him.

10) Forgiveness can be more for your benefit than the other person. True..holding anger is like drinking a poison, hoping the other person dies. Listen, forgiveness is a decision. You do not have to feel it to mean it. You do not have to wait until your feelings catch up to your decision. But for a follower of Christ, forgiveness is a way of life. It is a process, not an event and is not possible without praying for the strength and grace of God.

And Jesus ended the parable with these words:

“His master was angry and handed him over to the torturers, until he had paid the whole debt. And that is what my heavenly father will do to you, unless each of you forgives your brother or sister from your heart.”