

Father Rudy's Reflections
The Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time
September 17, 2023

Forgiveness: The Heart of Our Faith

My Brothers and Sisters in the Risen Lord,

"We all need to be forgiven by others, so we must all be ready to forgive. Asking and granting forgiveness is something profoundly worthy of every one of us."—St. Pope John Paul II

On May 13, 1981, as Pope John Paul II travelled through St. Peter's Square in his popemobile, a Turkey national Mehmet Ali Agca, made an assassination attempt on the pope's life that resulted in a prolonged recovery, and later, a most profound, heroic act of forgiveness. The Holy Father forgave this man when he visited him in prison two years after the attack. What that act must have meant to our dear pope, to his troubled aggressor, and really, to all of us as we continually struggle through our own vulnerabilities when it comes to forgiving another person for transgressions against us. This moment in time paints an extraordinary picture of what it truly means to forgive another person, and moreover, shines a surprising light on our own journey toward realizing the depths of humility, faith, and compassion we are capable of. Can we offer another person unlimited forgiveness when confronted with a perceived attack, and as this Gospel suggests, can we do so over and over again?

On this Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Matthew's Gospel presents us with the parable of the unforgiving servant who fails to forgive another of a minor debt after being forgiven of a major one himself. In examining your own conscience, have you ever been unsparing in certain instances out of a sense of moral superiority, intolerance, lack of empathy or an emotion that closes off your heart to offering forgiveness? Because of our own self-absorption, especially in this world that seems to be spinning out of control in this regard, offering generosity of spirit is often anathema to us, especially to those close to us as relatives and friends. Yes, forgiving is not easy; yes, it defies self-regard; and it does take time and great effort. We must consider, however, the moments in our own lives when compassionate individuals offered us a means of reconciliation. And, more importantly, we must consider how our dear Lord shows us mercy and compassion each and every day. By his death on the cross, he offered all of humanity his divine consideration and deep and abiding love.

Mother Teresa tells us that if we really want to love, we must learn how to forgive. We must forgive ultimately, even when we feel unable, because Jesus loves and forgives us. And to truly embrace this thought, we must consider that the fullness of our faith can surpass our innate fears, anxieties, hurt, and the inability to move forward with a hand outstretched to another person. We do this because we treasure and emulate Jesus Christ.

And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. . .

Yours in Christ,

Father Rudy