

A large, leafless tree silhouette is the central focus, set against a bright, hazy sunset or sunrise sky. The sun is positioned behind the tree's trunk, creating a lens flare effect. The background shows a calm body of water reflecting the light. The overall mood is serene and contemplative.

Forgiveness

Reflect on the word Forgiveness. Take a few moments to think, to hope and to pray about how God might create forgiveness in your life. How might your reflection shape you, change you and join you and Christ together? After you have taken a few minutes to reflect here, turn the page and read further.

The Eleventh Day of Lent

Monday March 1, 2010

Invocation

*How quick we are to take offense
at some perceived unfairness or slight, however small.
We know that your forgiveness is in place for us before we even ask.*

*When we forgive another, it may not result from a change in them.
The change may be in us—born of some confidence ...
being loved ourselves ... time ...
the ability with compassion to imagine the inner life of the other.*

*Help us to be open to receive your love
so that our grudge may quickly melt,
and sooner than later we both forgive and forget.
– Dr. William Longworth*

Reflection

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.”

– Matthew 5:43-45

Who among us can forget the tragic shooting in a one-room schoolhouse in the Amish community in 2006? Charles Carl Roberts stormed into the school and shot ten young girls, killing five of them and then committed suicide. Within hours of the tragedy, the Amish community came together to forgive Charles Roberts and to raise funds for his widow. According to accounts of that tragic event and the days that followed, the Amish community continued to reach out to the Robert's family and drew strength from a faith that taught them to live out forgiveness in their lives and to love their enemies.

Of course we know that tragedy changes us in ways that can't always be anticipated. Charles Carl Roberts, unable to forgive God over the death of his young daughter was tormented to the point that he was led to such violence. But for the Amish community, they knew their only hope and salvation was forgiveness.

As people of faith, we know that if we can bring our brokenness to God, in some mysterious way we are healed and that God will ultimately transform our tragedy into healing. In the Amish shooting tragedy the pivotal story was not the violence and horror of one tormented individual, it was the Amish witness to forgiveness – a witness that was experienced around the world.

*Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me,
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in hearts of all that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.
– From the Hymn of St. Patrick*

Benediction

*May you be enriched by your observance of Lent,
and may God fill your heart and mind with
wisdom, love and understanding. Amen.*

Your reflections...

The Twelfth Day of Lent

Tuesday, March 2, 2010

"So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us."

– 2 Corinthians 5:17-19

What exactly is forgiveness? Is it a feeling? An action? A decision? Harper's Bible Dictionary indicates that at least one of the terms used in the Old Testament for the verb 'forgive' is best translated as erase or wipe away. Not just forgiven but forgotten seems to be the biblical understanding of the term.

Perhaps forgiveness is best understood as a choice. It is the choice to become willing to have our hearts shaped by forgiveness. When forgiveness seems impossible, God invites us to rest awhile in His forgiveness. If we are willing to turn toward God's forgiveness, we begin to realize that not only are we forgiven, but that God also forgives those we are unable to forgive. When we set aside our hardness of heart and choose to come to God with a willingness of heart, God can transform us in ways that we cannot imagine. God's transforming power, far greater than our own ability to forgive, can lead to times of peace and reconciliation that can only be described as a new creation.

Gracious and most loving God, create in me a willing heart. Amen.

Your reflections. . .

The Thirteenth Day of Lent

Wednesday, March 3, 2010

"Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us . . ."
– Matthew 6:12

We have all heard it said that confession is good for the soul, and intuitively, we all know that to be true. However, allowing ourselves to be vulnerable enough to admit wrongdoing and to seek to make amends for wrong action is not an easy thing, albeit essential for the healing of our souls and our relationships.

My good friend stood before me, hemming and hawing. "Is there something you need to ask me?" "No, no - there is something that I need to tell you. Please don't be upset." I imagined any number of horrible things, so when my friend revealed that she had shared what she had believed to be a confidence with another friend, I laughed with relief. I was so glad to know that there was no major illness or problem, and of course, the willingness to be open and share a perceived wrong has ultimately strengthened our relationship. Is it possible that when we go to God with our burdens, there is more than our relief; there is God's joy – the joy of knowing that now forgiveness can be extended? Our only responsibility is to accept it.

Where do you stand in need of forgiveness? What will it take for you to either offer or accept forgiveness?

"Come to me, all who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in my heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden light."

– Matthew 11:28-30

Your reflections. . .

The Fourteenth Day of Lent

Thursday, March 4, 2010

"Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Happy are those to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. While I kept silence, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' and you forgave the guilt of my sin."

– Psalm 32:1-5

Forgiveness and freedom seem to be inextricably linked to one another, and who among us does not wish for freedom. Clearly, the Psalmist is in misery until his sin is confronted and brought before God. No doubt, God forgave the sin, but the Psalmist records that God relieved him of the guilt of his sin. Apparently, guilt built the prison, in which the Psalmist found himself.

National Public Radio hosts a segment called "This I Believe", which is essentially a public dialogue about belief. Some of the most inspirational pieces are on forgiveness and invariably, the writers of these pieces recount that the power of forgiveness leads to freedom – freedom from guilt and hatred; and freedom to love and hope.

"To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover that the prisoner was you."
– Lewis B. Smedes

Your reflections. . .

The Fifteenth Day of Lent

Friday, March 5, 2010

"For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation."
– Romans 5:10-11

Take some time to develop a list of people at whom you are angry or resentful. As you list these people, consider the cause of your anger or resentment and how your negative feelings affect the rest of your life. Are you ready to forgive? If not, offer your enemies to God until such time as you are ready.

Now take some time to develop a list of people who may be angry at you or resent you for some reason. As you develop this list, consider steps that you could take that might lead to healing. Are you ready to take such steps? Would your offer of forgiveness and reconciliation make a difference?

Your Reflections. . .

The Sixteenth Day of Lent

Saturday, March 6, 2010

'For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.'

– Matthew 6:14-15

This scripture suggests that receiving forgiveness is inseparable from giving forgiveness. We cannot do one without the other. But sometimes we are trapped. Maybe we feel that we are forgiven by God, but we are unable to forgive those who have injured us. The injuries are just too great or seem unpardonable. On the other hand, we may be able to forgive others but have no real assurance of our own forgiveness. Perhaps we feel that we are unworthy of God's forgiveness or that our sins are too terrible for anyone to forgive. The good news is that God loves us anyway and is able to do that which we cannot do. Scripture assures us that we are truly forgiven and that God stands ready to enable us to forgive others. Think about your own life. Which part of forgiveness is harder for you, receiving forgiveness or forgiving others? Ask God to help you with that part of forgiveness that is difficult for you. Remember, God can do what might be impossible for us to do alone.

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

Where there is hatred, let me sow love;

where there is injury, pardon;

where there is doubt, faith;

where there is despair, hope;

where there is darkness, light;

and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek

to be consoled as to console;

to be understood as to understand;

to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive;

it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;

and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

– Prayer of St. Francis

Your reflections. . .

The Third Sunday in Lent

March 7, 2010

Celebrating the Spiritual Disciplines: *Confession*

In facing ourselves and giving up our pretenses, we find freedom – the freedom to recognize that our sin hurts others as well as ourselves. Confession frees us to recognize our own human failings and to make forgiveness a reality in our lives.

Consider the possibility of inviting God to enter into your heart and show you areas of your life that stand in need of His forgiveness and healing. Would an act of confession allow God to create something new in you?

*This Lenten Season
Create in me. . . Harmony
Create in me . . . Purpose
Create in me. . . Forgiveness
And now bring me to Courage
That I may seek God's will
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.*

Your reflections...