



THE MISSION OF SAINT MARY MAGDALENE

Father Alan's Blog

For the Twenty-Second Sunday After Trinity - October 31, 2021

"So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses."

St. Matthew 18:35 (KJV)

A young woman had two children; her son was seven years old, and her little daughter was about two-and-a-half. One day, the woman heard this terrible scream. After running upstairs, she found out that the little girl was pulling her older brother's hair and he was crying out in pain. The young mother gently removed the girl's hands off her brother's hair and said to her son:

"Sweetheart, your sister does not understand that it hurts."

The son nodded okay to what his mother said. However, as the mother was walking down the stairs, she again heard this blood-curdling shriek. Immediately, she wheeled around and ran back upstairs to see what had happened. This time, the boy was sitting next to the little girl who was now crying out in pain - at which point, the boy matter-of-factly said to his mother:

"NOW she understands!"



During every single worship service found in the 1962 Canadian Book of Common Prayer (BCP) we pray “The Lord’s Prayer”, wherein we earnestly ask Our Father in heaven to:

“...forgive us our trespasses...”

Nevertheless, there’s a catch – a BIG catch – to this humble petition. Extremely easy to say, yet extremely hard to do, it’s found in the very next clause:

“As we forgive them that trespass against us...”

Forgiving as God forgives us means that we are to sacrifice our right to inflict pain on the one who has pained us:

“As we forgive THEM that trespass against us...”

All too often, though, just like the seven-year-old boy in the story above, we want to make sure that the person who has hurt us knows exactly what it is like to be hurt.



In today’s Collect, we pray:

“Lord, we beseech Thee to keep Thy household the Church in CONTINUAL GODLINESS (or ‘HOLINESS’)...”

because the Church, being the Household of God, needs His:

 **constant care; and**
 **unceasing guidance,**

so that it may be free from all adversaries, and thus enabled, serve Almighty God – as His “divine family” – in all good works.

As Christians we are taught that:

 **Holy Baptism is the rebirth of a child of God into His divine family; and**

 **Holy Communion is the gathering of that divine family at The Father's table.**

Furthermore, as members of our Heavenly Father's divine family, we confess in both the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds that ours is the "HOLY Catholic Church". (Please note: it is not its members which make the Church holy; rather, it is our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ Who loved the Church so much that He willingly gave Himself for it, purifying it by the washing of living water in Holy Baptism and by His most-precious Blood at Holy Communion. Thus, as St. Paul testifies in Ephesians 5:27b, the True Church is glorious and will be presented to the Lord Jesus when He returns as:

"...without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless."

Accordingly, we, as members of Christ's "One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church", are called to become, through the power of the Holy Spirit, holy in our lives – **our ENTIRE lives.**)



Trinity Season, especially, prompts us to grow in holiness as individuals within the household of God. As St. Paul attests in chapter 1, verse 6 of today's Epistle Lesson to the Philippians:

"...that He who hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

Even so, the Church is continually faced with opposition and persecution from without – **and within** – its family. For not only is the Church attacked daily by an unbelieving world on the outside, but she is also constantly assailed by **those on the inside** who do not believe, at all, in the truth of the Christ’s Gospel, as contained in God’s Holy Scriptures. Thus, in today’s Collect we implore God for His protection – for without it and without His enduring presence (His **omnipresence**, if you will), we have no help of ourselves to help ourselves:

“...that through Thy protection it may be free from ALL adversities...”

However, we do not ask God’s protection for the Church simply so that it will survive, but we must also be, as our Collect entreats:

“...devoutly given to serve Thee in good works, to the glory of Thy Name...”

In short, the Church exists for the Glory of God **period**. Likewise, its supreme purpose is that it may devoutly serve Him in all good works. St. James (in chapter 2, verses 14-26 of his General Epistle), writes about the relationship between faith and action (or “good works”), culminating his argument by asserting (in verse 17):

“...faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”

Thus, a sincere desire to perform “good works” should be our response to God’s love for us. In other words, we need to adopt the mindset (or better still, the HEARTSET) of:

 **After everything that God has done for us, WHAT CAN WE POSSIBLY DO for Him in return?**

This is not news; in fact, St. Paul prays (in verse 11) of today's Epistle Lesson that the church in Philippi may be:

"...filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ - to the glory and praise of God."

Both today's Collect and Epistle Lesson, therefore, should serve as encouragements to us to persevere as members of Christ's Holy Church, the "divine family" of faith.

 **Perseverance, to the Christian mind, means not being imprisoned by "the world, the flesh, and the devil".**

Hence, we are literally called to refuse to become a prisoner to the devil - and to sin. (Mother Teresa, for example, very much believed that we become "imprisoned" by our possessions in that:

 **we must spend time and money in taking care of them;**
 **we need a place to put them;**
 **and so on.**

Therefore, Mother Teresa gave everything she received away, for she refused to become imprisoned by possessions.)

The desire for, and collecting of, possessions are two types of imprisonment with which we all must contend. However, we can also become imprisoned by our hatred of others for the wrongs they have done to us. As a result, we spend way too much:

 **precious time; and**
 **scant physical, emotional, and spiritual resources**

looking for revenge. In seeking our pound of flesh, our mantra thus becomes:

 **"I don't get mad I get even!"**

(Or, as the wise author of Proverbs 14:10 wrote 3,000+ years ago:

“The heart knows its own bitterness, and a stranger does not share its joy.”

Three thousand years, and so little has changed.)



In today's Gospel Lesson from St. Matthew 18:21-35, Peter asked Jesus (in verse 21):

“Master, how many times do I forgive a brother or sister who hurts me? Seven?”

In commenting on this passage, Max Lucado writes in Chapter 15 of his 1996 book, “In the Grip of Grace”:

“Peter is worried about over-forgiving an offender. The Jewish law stipulated that the wounded forgive three times. Peter is willing to double that and throw in one more for good measure. No doubt he thinks Jesus will be impressed. Jesus isn't. The Master's answer (in verse 22) still stuns us. ‘Seven! Hardly! Try seventy times seven.’

“If you're pausing to multiply seventy times seven, you're missing the point. Keeping tabs on your mercy, Jesus is saying, is not being merciful. If you're calibrating your grace, you're not being gracious. There should never be a point at which our grace is exhausted.”

And to paraphrase Lucado:

“Jesus then proceeds to tell His disciples (in verses 23-34) ‘The Parable of Unmerciful Servant.’ Now, the meaning of this two-part parable is simple (as in ‘straightforward’, not as in ‘easy’), namely:

☪ Our debt is far greater than our ability to pay.

“Our pockets are empty, and we owe a fortune. We don’t need a paycheque; we need a miracle – and God has given us one in His Son Jesus Christ. As St. Paul proclaims in Romans 3:22:

‘God makes people right with Himself through their faith in Jesus Christ.’

“When we do wrong, our Heavenly Father does not demand reimbursement. The Almighty does not insist on His pound of flesh. In short, the Alpha and the Omega exacts no payment (at least not from us, anyway) because He paid it HIMSELF on the cross.”



⚠ And our ability to forgive others is a signal of our awareness of JUST how much God has given to us.

Before receiving our Lord Jesus Christ’s blessed Body and Blood today, let’s take a few moments prior to “The General Confession” to reflect upon our relationships with others – because isn’t it more than a little bit presumptuous of us to draw near to the “Throne of Grace” if we haven’t been gracious in return to the people in our lives?

I mean, how can we even dare to approach a merciful God, if we ourselves have hearts full of bitterness and anger? As children of God, we are called to take care of our relationship problems, to make up with our:

- 👤 spouse;
- 👤 relative; or
- 👤 friend,

♥ or, more simply, to love our neighbours.

Then – and only then – will we be fully united in prayer and praise of our Heavenly Father.

Mark this down:

We will glorify God only if we zealously:

- ✓ mark;
- ✓ learn; and
- ✓ inwardly digest,

the message of today's Collect, Epistle, and Gospel Lessons: that we may be kept "in continual godliness" by:

- † relying solely upon God's divine protection;
- † seeking to serve Him in all good works; and
- † forgiving others as we would have them forgive us when we wrong them.

"Ye that do truly and earnestly repent you of your sins, and are in love and charity with your neighbours, and intend to lead the new life, following the commandments of God, and walking from henceforth in his holy ways: Draw near with faith, and take this holy Sacrament to your comfort, and make your humble confession to Almighty God, meekly kneeling upon your knees."



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