

FEAST OF PENTECOST 2014
June 8, 2014

Theme: On a mission of forgiveness

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“You don’t know me, but I am no longer dating your husband...I’m sorry for any pain I caused your family.”

Christy recalls the exact moment she read that sentence, in an e-mail sent to her home account.

“My heart just stopped,” says the mother of four. “I felt paralyzed.”

After confronting her husband of twenty years, finally hearing his tearful confession, explanation and sorrow, and after weeks of her own tears and anger, Christy knew she had to decide whether or not she could forgive him.

Thankfully most incidences of forgiveness in marriage and family life are not so serious or dramatic.

Most often they are about repeatedly leaving the lid off the toothpaste, or not putting gas in the car when promised, or making an unflattering comment in front of a neighbor or in-law.

Yet, forgiveness has to be part of every healthy and holy marriage and family.

Forgiveness, healing, freedom from the oppression of sin and evil, is the heart of the Christian Gospel and Christian mission according to the message of this Pentecost Feast.

Forgiveness is the task given to us by the Risen Christ, the task for which he has given us his own breath of new life, the Holy Spirit.

“He breathed on them and said: Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive sins, they are forgiven.”

When Jesus looked at his world – much as when we look at ours – he saw forgiveness as the pressing need of humanity, as the major factor at the root of so much personal and social pain in the world.

For example, for generations now world leaders have struggled to “fashion peace in the middle east.”

And yet, until the Palestinians and Israelis can forgive each other for all the horrible past evils they have both inflicted on each other and risk trusting one other, there will never be peace in the Middle East.

On the Internet there is a remarkable site called the “Forgiveness Project” that features forgiveness stories from places like the Middle East, Rwanda, South Africa, Bosnia and even from places of sexual, criminal and physical abuse, including the church.

In each of these stories, someone was the agent of forgiveness and because of that forgiveness was able to begin healing a wound of sin or suffering or hurt.

While we may not all be in these dramatic global situations, we all encounter people in need of forgiveness and healing in our daily lives.

As noted earlier, in our homes and families, because we live together we sometimes rub each other the wrong way; we say and do things -- or forget to say and do things -- that are hurtful.

The same in neighbors, at work, in all the larger communities and groups to which we belong.

We also come across people who have been hurt by others but never been healed: those emotionally scarred by their own parents, by alcoholism or neglect or mental illness, but never allowed the chance to heal.

---or maybe those who have never forgiven themselves for the sins and failures of their own youth.

Through our friendship or kindness or listening ear – and the power of the Spirit -- they may finally let forgiveness penetrate their hearts and feel God's healing and joy and peace.

“As the Father has sent me so I send you,” said the risen Jesus.

“And then he breathed on them and said: ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’”

The Risen Jesus breathed into us, brothers and sisters, some of his eternal Spirit so we could do what he did, namely forgive sins.

Now, surely, he was not talking just about forgiving sins in the Sacrament of Reconciliation of Confession -- that is only one type of forgiveness and healing that we priests do.

The more common or prevalent healing is what happens in everyday life, in the world where we all live, among people and families.

Jesus sends all of us to forgive and he gives us a share of his own eternal Spirit to do so.

And he also says if we don't do it, it will not get done: **“Whose sins you retain, are retained.”** In other words, forgiveness depends on us.

“This is my Body...This is my Blood given and pour out for the forgiveness of sins.”

There it is again: Forgiveness of sin, the heart of it all.

Our sins have been forgiven.

Let's go tell the world theirs have been forgiven too.