

# Holy Spirit Province

## PROVINCIAL NEWSLETTER

Date - 7 September 2020



---

### **FORGIVING OVER AND OVER AGAIN: 24TH SUNDAY A**

September 11 will be the 19<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the wickedness which led to the destruction of the twin towers in New York and the destruction of thousands of lives and families. It all seems simply unforgivable. So much so that it may be almost impossible to accept what Jesus says in his message today, about the need to forgive others completely, and to do so any number of times.

It doesn't help that we find ourselves living in a society which is often hell-bent on revenge, for the hurt and harm which human beings inflict upon one another. But pay-back was not the attitude of Jesus, and it has not been the attitude of his genuine followers, such as Martin Luther King. He courageously led the movement for human and civil rights for his people, but for all his efforts, he ended up being murdered in cold blood. Yet he used to say: 'Forgiveness is not an occasional act; it is a permanent attitude.' In fact, it's a healthy attitude as well. For nursing anger and resentment are dangerous for our health, and in some instances even fatal.

Nicholas is a dedicated young man who runs a faith renewal program for men in prison. Those who take part are regularly 'bagged' by the other prisoners. On one occasion a man was bashed on his way back to his cell, simply for being part of what his assailant called 'that Christian thing'. Yet he refused to reveal to the warden the name of his assailant, even when the warden threatened to get his sentence extended. Why did he refuse to do in his enemy? His answer in his own words was: 'I wanted to forgive another human being just like God has forgiven me.' When the one who had bashed him heard about this, he was so deeply affected by his victim's answer, that a few months later he himself signed up for faith renewal and experienced the power for himself of 'that Christian thing'.

What happened to both prisoners is an extension of the story which Jesus told, about being ready to forgive as readily and as generously as God forgives us, which is to say, over and over and over again.

In the days of Peter and Jesus, the Jewish rabbis taught that the duty to forgive had been fulfilled if one forgave an offender three times. Peter must have thought he was being extra generous if he forgave seven times. But Jesus teaches that for members of his community there's to be no limit to their forgiveness. This teaching of Jesus makes him stand out from all other teachers. So does the way he followed this up, by forgiving his unrepentant executioners as he hung dying upon the cross.

Quite a bit is being written today on the question of reconciliation. Until recently we have thought the process begins with the offender repenting of the offence and then asking for forgiveness. Those who have done serious research in the matter disagree. They have learnt that the process must begin with the one offended offering forgiveness, and that this willingness to forgive transforms the one offering forgiveness. From being a victim, he/she becomes a survivor. They have also learned that such generosity may touch the heart of the offender so much that the offender ceases to be an enemy and becomes a friend.

We all know how hard it can be to forgive someone who has offended us, because our dignity and self-esteem have been wounded and our feelings have been hurt, perhaps very deeply. When we are hurt, our unredeemed instinct is to lash out and inflict pain in return. We want to even the score. Many people would not blame us for feeling like this. In fact, some would even encourage us to retaliate and take revenge. But revenge and pay-back are the tough ways of the world, but not the peace-making ways of Jesus. Once again, his disciples follow a less-travelled road.

Today Jesus gives us another example of how Christians must give to others what God has given to them. Nothing anyone owes us can compare with what we owe to God. If God has been so generous in forgiving us, we surely can and must be, generous in forgiving others.

Of course, the process of becoming a forgiving person takes time. For some of us it may take a lifetime. Only little by little are our anger and fury, our bitterness and resentment reduced, and our desire to strike back and even perhaps to throttle the offender diminished. In fact, it is only through time and through the grace of God, i.e. through the influence of the Holy Spirit, that we can let go of our hurts.

Sad to say, one man who cannot let go of his anger is Phil Cleary, former champion Coburg footballer, and more recently a TV sports commentator, with his own distinct and engaging style. We learn in a magazine article called 'Maintaining the Rage', that he cannot let go of his anger towards the man who murdered his sister and towards the justice system. His feelings are very understandable, because of the huge pain of his loss and grief for the sister he loved so dearly, and our hearts go out to him. His feelings are understandable even though the murderer has since died. But on the other hand, it's clear that unless and until Phil can come to accept his loss and let go of his anger, he will never have any sense of closure, and never enjoy the peace of mind he so desperately craves.

His story tells me that if we become obsessed with our rage, anger, resentment, frustration, and desire for revenge, our obsession will tend to destroy us. On the other hand, it is only when we begin to forgive, that we will start to be healed. So, for the grace for ourselves to forgive others who have hurt and offended us, and for the grace for Phil Cleary and others like him, to start to recover from the terrible things that have happened to them, let us pray sincerely and often to the Lord, who is Forgiveness Itself!

[bgleesoncp@gmail.com](mailto:bgleesoncp@gmail.com)