

June 2023

Forgive Yourself:

On the occasion of Father's day weekend, I thought I'd start with a few phrases that you will rarely hear from your father:

1. What do you know, I think I'm lost.
2. Here's my credit card, please go crazy.
3. I can't believe how much you appreciate all that I've done for you.
4. No, I don't see any reason why you should have to get a job.
5. You know what, I think you need another tattoo.

And finally, phrases we rarely hear from our fathers: "I don't care what you've done or why, you are forgiven."

I'd like to think that most fathers are generous with forgiveness but an examination of the deterioration of American families would suggest that forgiveness is often difficult; difficult not only for fathers, but for mothers, and sons and daughters and grandparents and aunts and uncles...well you get the point. According to *The Journal of Psychology and Health*, one-third of Americans who say they lie awake at least a few nights a week are struggling with offering or receiving forgiveness. Then the study prescribed forgiveness as a way to overcome **insomnia** (Loren Toussaint, Andrew J. Gall, Alyssa Cheadle, and David R. Williams, "Let it rest: Sleep and health as positive correlates of forgiveness of others and self-forgiveness," *Psychology & Health*, pp. 302-317, July 31, 2019). Forgiveness of others is often difficult, but perhaps even harder is forgiveness of oneself.

If I asked those here to raise their hands if they wanted to go to heaven, I imagine every hand would go up. Otherwise you wouldn't be here. But if I asked for a show of hands from those of us who were absolutely, 100% sure that they were going to heaven, many of us would leave our arms at our side. We would struggle because, in our hearts, we know that we are flawed. I find this trepidation especially true when I visit the elderly and seriously ill.

Within my ministry to the sick, I have had the privilege of spending time in prayer with multiple parishioners who were nearing death. On a number of those

occasions, the dying person has expressed fear with regard to their future. I recall one woman in particular who was battling terminal cancer. She was a kind woman with a lovely soul and disposition. She prayed frequently and she cherished the opportunity to receive the Eucharist. And nearly every time that we met, she questioned her worthiness of salvation. In her final weeks, every single visit included her recounting her most awful sins of the past and questioning whether God's forgiveness was truly possible.

Let me digress for a moment. As a deacon, I am open to hearing about all your sins, great and small, but remember, I can't do anything about it. Yes, Deacons can hatch, match and dispatch = that is baptize, marry and preside at funerals outside of Mass, but only a priest can forgive sins and offer absolution. What a deacon can do, however, is assure you that if you approach our Lord with heartfelt contrition, your sins are forgiven.

Now back to the dying woman I was telling you about. No matter what I'd say or how I'd try to comfort her, she would inevitably remind me about her most terrible sin. And frankly, she was not wrong -at least regarding the severity of her sin. But she was completely mistaken to believe that any of her actions were incapable of being consoled with our heavenly Father. God had forgiven her. We just read in Paul's letter to the Romans that Christ died on the cross for the ungodly. We are assured of his love for us in that he died for us even though we were sinners. And we are reminded that by his blood, WE ARE SAVED and the gates of heaven are opened to us. Paul will further remind us that nothing can separate us from God's love - not even our worst sins. Fr. Rick has a plaque that quotes C.S. Lewis and reads: "If God forgives us then we must forgive ourselves otherwise it's like setting ourselves up as a higher tribunal than God." There will always be things that we have done that we should not have done and there will always be things we should have done that we have not. If our heavenly Father can

forgive us for those occasions, then we need to find the strength to forgive ourselves and believe in the promise of the resurrected Christ. After all, that's why he endured the cross for us. When we accept our heavenly Father's gracious and undeserved forgiveness, when asked who's going to heaven, we can all confidently raise our hand!