

Saint Thomas and Saint Thomas of the Air Church
 Trinity XXII
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“forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us”

This week, we reach the conclusion of the Trinity Summer Survey
 of Essential Christian Doctrine
 with the thorny notion of Christian Forgiveness.

Jesus gives us a parable which gives us pause
 And takes us through the subject from the point of view
 Of the sinner asking to be forgiven
 And the victim who is asked to forgive.

Peter frames the subject well:

“Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me
 and I forgive him?”

For a moment, let’s examine what Peter is talking about:

This business of forgiving and being forgiven;
 What does it mean to forgive someone
 And what does it mean to be forgiven?
 in the Christian context?

First let us consider what it means to forgive even the most
 grievous sin.

If we break the word down into its two parts, perhaps we can better
 understand its Christian meaning;

The ancient Anglo-Saxon meaning
 of the prefix “for” was: “thoroughly”
 As in the concept of completeness, absolute,
 Always or permanence.
 As in the words; “forgo, or forbidden, forget”.

The suffix; “give” makes us think of imparting something
and receiving nothing in return.

Putting the two thoughts together we get the idea of
Pardoning, no longer being angry, abandoning all resentment
All desire to punish, to cancel all debt,
to cease all displeasure, to excuse; all of these
But completely and forever with no expectancy of any reward or
any return in exchange.
And, perhaps the most difficult part; forever.

So the forgiveness that Peter is talking about is to forgive someone
As if the offense had never happened
And when you think of the offense there is no regret
And no expectancy of anything in return or
Desire for retribution.

The forgiveness of God is like that:
As if our offenses had never happened.
And will never be mentioned again
Ever.

It can be a lot to ask.
But until you reach that point, the forgiveness that Peter
Is talking about
is incomplete,
False,
or only transitory or an expedient of the moment.
But it is not true Christian forgiveness.

So much for what it takes to forgive someone.
So much for “as we forgive those who trespass against us”.

What of the other side? How do we qualify to be forgiven?
What about “forgive us our trespasses”?

What is required for us to seek Christian forgiveness?
 What does it take for us to receive it?

Are the bare words themselves enough?
 Or, is there a state of mind
 Of heart
 And of soul that must accompany the words?

Is there an element of conscience?

The initial aspect of being forgiven is to recognize
 Your offense
 Your sin.

To understand in your mind that you have caused harm
 Harm to another human being
 But harm to God as well.

Every sin against mankind is a sin against God.

We are called to love our neighbor as ourselves
 And a sin against another is a failure of that love.
 And thus breaches the commandment of Jesus
 to love one another.

We are also called to love God, and with all our hearts minds and
 souls.

 When we have sinned and harmed one of His creatures
 It is a sin against the One who created it.

We need a well-formed conscience in order to recognize the
 gravity of our actions and inactions.

Sadly some have a weak conscience or none at all.

 In my experience those poor souls are mostly atheists and
 pagans.

And sadly some have an over zealous conscience that convicts
 where none is warranted.

 Those poor souls suffer where none is required.

But most of us have a well-formed conscience
That carefully evaluates the situation
And our actions and inactions
To determine more or less objectively
When we have caused harm.

This is not always apparent
And not always easy to determine.
Sometimes what looks at first to be our fault
Turns out not to be,
Where the harm was unavoidable
Or not the product of our act but something else entirely.

At other times there may be harm and there may be a causal link
But the element of intent is lacking.
Our sins are a product of our intentional misdoing.
We are innocent of sin if we acted without knowledge of the harm
it would cause.

So the first step in seeking forgiveness is to pause and let your
conscience examine the situation, everything that happened
And reach a conviction of guilt only where it is warranted.

But after listening to your conscience, and you are certain of a sin
We cannot seek forgiveness unless we feel true remorse in our
hearts for what we did.

A genuine aching feeling of regret
A longing that it had never happened.
A compulsion to make it right again, if at all possible.

Lastly a yearning deep in our soul of contrition.
A crushing in spirit of remorse, regret and guilt.

It is only then that we can seek Christian forgiveness.
And it is only then that we can receive it
And only then that we can offer it.

Just when we thought we had this forgiveness thing in hand Jesus gives us a parable of “the unmerciful servant” and we must take more into consideration.

The parable is straight forward and does not need to be repeated. However, there are a few aspects that we could not understand from the ancient wording.

First, the debt of the first servant (the wicked servant) that the king, standing in for God, forgives.

There has been much research into what ten thousand talents might be in today’s dollars.

An important aspect of the parable.

By any analysis 10,000 talents was a huge amount.

as much as 60 million dollars in today’s currency.

Regardless of the worth of 10,000 talents in today’s currency

The point is that the amount that God forgave

The wicked servant

Is impossibly huge

More than he could have paid off

In many lifetimes of labor.

Yet, God forgave the entire thing.

Such is the magnanimity of God

And great comfort to us

No matter what the sin,

No matter the enormity of what we have done

It does not have to be a bar to forgiveness.

Second, is the corresponding amount of the debt owed by the fellow servant that the wicked servant refused to forgive: an hundred pence.

A small amount that could be repaid in a matter of months at the prevailing wage of the day.

Third, let's examine the words and deeds of both servants:

The wicked servant

Fell down at his feet and worshipped the king
 He begged: "Lord, have patience with me
 And I will pay thee all."

The fellow-servant

Fell down at the feet of the wicked servant and
 Begged him saying: "Have patience with me
 And I will pay thee all".

On the surface, both servants
 said and did identical things
 using almost identical words.

But their hearts, minds and souls were not even closely aligned.

While the wicked servant voiced all the right words and did the right things

His promise to "pay thee all"
 Was hollow, false and bordering on deceit.
 He could never repay it.

His heart, mind and soul

were far from what they needed to be
 in order to be forgiven.
 In truth, he all but lied to the king
 in hopes of falsely qualifying for the King's forgiveness.

The fellow servant on the other hand

Not only said and did the right things
 But sincerely sought the opportunity to make it right.

Now for the power of this parable;

We learn of another requirement

Another precursor to being forgiven.

We must forgive those that we can

If we ourselves are to be forgiven.

“forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us”.

We who seek mercy must do mercy.
We who seek forgiveness must give forgiveness.

Please do not be misled here. It is easy to do with this parable.

The reason we offer forgiveness
Is not so that we can be forgiven.
There can be no expectancy of reward
behind our offer to forgive.
If there were, it would not be a gift or sacrifice.

The reason we offer forgiveness is to come within the spirit of love
Demanded of all Christians.

And to comply with Jesus’ commandment to love our
neighbors as ourselves.

You see, just as with many things in Christianity,
the acts of giving and receiving forgiveness
Are both sacrificial in nature.

When you offer forgiveness
You sacrifice, your anger, your deep desire for retribution
Your sense of fairness and justice
You give up your desire to punish, to get even.

When you ask for forgiveness
You abandon all sense of innocence, excuse,
Any attempt to justify your behavior
and acknowledge your guilt.
You abandon your pride and own up to your act in shame.

It is in this mysterious interchange of sacrifice
That both the forgiver and the forgiven
Come closer to the love of God
And thus a step closer to God.