

Saint Thomas and Saint Thomas of the Air Church
 Second Sunday in Advent
 December 8, 2024
 rmceely+

For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly father will also forgive you.
 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your
 trespasses.

Jesus, the Christ (Matt 6:14).

Many of you recognize today's Collect and Epistle
 And know that today is traditionally known as Bible Sunday
 And that the sermon topic is usually concerns
 Holy Scripture and the Bible.

However, I want to go off script today
 and speak about something else.

You know, the Birth of Our Lord
 is the most stunning thing that ever happened in the world.
 It is such a time of great joy and celebration
 that our entire culture has embraced it in one form or another
 Even if it does not know why.

The joy of the season bursts out in music
 In decorations, Christmas trees
 Even cars get decorations
 Even our clothes sometimes bear a symbol of the joy.

The joy bursts out
 In the tradition of giving gifts.
 In lights adorning homes and office buildings
 All over the city.
 In our food, In parties and gatherings
 Even people of different religions or no religion
 Can't help but share in the joy
 That Christians feel for the Birth of the Son of God.
 God With Us.

But if we are consumed with our own demons
 Our own troubles,
 How can we know the true joy of His Birth?
 How will we ever receive Him in our lives
 In the spirit of His love and sacrifice
 His great gift?
 How will we ever experience the joy of our salvation
 That is Christmas,
 If that joy is burdened with the stain of our sins?
 The weight of the harm we have inflicted?
 The barrier we have erected between Christ and us?

So Centuries ago, the oh so practical Church
 Gave us Advent, to prepare for His coming.
 In Advent, we seek our Lord's forgiveness for our transgressions.
 To prepare our hearts
 So they can be filled with joy.

This morning, I would speak about forgiveness.
 Two kinds of forgiveness.
 First, God's forgiveness of our transgressions.
 For those things we have done, large and small
 To harm others.
 For those things we ought to have done; But did not.
 To the detriment of others.
 Knowing that every time we transgress and harm someone else
 we also wound Our Lord.

I can think of three ways to seek the forgiveness of Our Lord.
 In your private prayers and devotions
 Go to Him.
 In the General Confession of the Communion Service
 And in a confidential confession to a priest.

However, you choose to do it
 Have an honest, objective and forthright conversation.
 Pour out your heart.

You have nothing to lose.
 God knows you.
 He created you.
 He likely already knows
 And is anxious to wipe away your sins.

The Absolution of Our Lord will cleanse your soul
 Remove the tarnish,
 Tear down the wall,
 Relieve you of guilt.
 Give you a new start free of the past that was plaguing you.
 Think of that life without the anchor holding you back.

That is the first kind of forgiveness.
But I said there were two kinds of forgiveness.
 The second kind is the kind where you forgive others.

In a sense we can chose to forgive others
 Or chose not to forgive others.
But as we learned in the Trinity Season Survey of Essential
Christian Doctrine last Summer
 Our sins are forgiven as we forgive others.

It is a hard thing forgiving others
 Especially those who have caused grievous harm in your life.

We know from the Lord's Prayer
 In which we pray: forgive us our trespasses
 As we forgive those who trespass against us.
When He gave us the Lord's Prayer, Jesus made sure we
understood, these are His very next words:

For if ye forgive men their trespasses,
 your heavenly father will also forgive you.
 But if ye forgive not men their trespasses,
 neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

We know from the lips of Jesus:
 The parable of the unforgiving servant. (Matt 18:21)
 And what happened to him when he was forgiven
 The massive debt but would not himself forgive
 A trivial one owed to him.

In Luke's account of Jesus' sermon on the plain
 Jesus said "forgive, and ye shall be forgiven". Luke 6:37

So you have a choice, sort of.
 But you won't receive it unless you give it.

So it turns out that the best way to prepare for Christmas
 Is to ask for and to give forgiveness.

Giving forgiveness.
 You have been wrongfully
 hurt, harmed,
 scarred, damaged, grieved.
 You are angered. Justifiably so.
 You are resentful,
 Maybe even hateful.
 You want retribution, justice. Vengeance.
 Hey. This is San Francisco, the home of the 1851 Vigilantes
 Why not?

Because you rob yourself of happiness
Even good mental health sometimes.
Most psychologists will tell you
That people who can't forgive,
Can't let go of past hurts
And who hold on to grudges
Rarely, if ever, smile or seem happy.
Withholding forgiveness can even be detrimental to our physical
health.
If we want to be happy in this world, we must give forgiveness.

John McCain was imprisoned in Vietnam for 5 1/2 years
And suffered life long injuries at the hands of his captors
He was inexplicably tortured for most of that time
by the sadistic animals who held him.
John publicly forgave his tormentors.
So did Jesus.

But let's say none of that makes sense
And you withhold forgiveness.
What then?
You carry with you the hurt
The resentment. The anger.
Does it fester?
Does it dominate your thoughts?
Your sleep?
Does it become an obsession?
Constantly ruminating about it?
Are you the only person it is harming?
Family?
Friends? Loved ones?
A greek philosopher once said
Holding onto the resentment is like drinking poison
And hoping the other person dies.

The harm of the offense was from the outside
But your anger and resentment is from inside.
From you.

You don't want to take anger, bitterness, resentment into
Christmas.
You want to be in the best state of heart and mind and soul as you
dive into Christmas.
Go into Christmas with a clear conscience.

There are a few things that forgiveness is not.
Forgiveness is a one way street
And is not reconciliation.
Not an exchange for something else.
Do not expect anything in return.
It is based upon you; not the offender.

Forgiveness is not condoning or excusing the misbehavior.
Forgiveness is not an all or nothing proposition
It is a process. It can be a journey.
Forgiveness is not about forgetting
It's remembering, but in a new way.

If that is what forgiveness is not.
This is what it is:
St Aquinas called it offering an undeserved gift.
You have taken something from me
Joy, happiness, peace
And you can never repay it.
You owe me.
You don't deserve it, but I am giving you forgiveness
anyway.

Forgiveness is an opportunity to grow in virtue

--A gift from God.

It is liberation from hurt and anger that you carry inside.

It is very much an indication of holiness

Evidence you are living a Christ Centered Life.

It is the best gift you can give yourself.

Maybe you should think about making forgiveness
the gift of Christmas.

