

Gospel Meditation: *Matthew 6:14-15*

Individually or as a group, watch the Lenten devotional video and work through the following meditation.

¹⁴ For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵ But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

REFLECT—*Sink into this passage for the next seven days using the following prompts:*

- Find a comfortable place and empty your mind of its many thoughts.
- Imagine Jesus speaking these words directly to you.
 - What does he sound like?
 - What's the tone of his voice?

REPENT—*Take next steps to change your mind and behavior through the following prompts:*

- Allow the gaze of Jesus to pierce your heart and let him bring to mind those you need to forgive.
 - Let their faces come to your attention.
 - Look in their eyes and remember the wrong they did to you.
 - Verbally say, "I forgive you."
- Look deeper into the eyes of Jesus and allow him to bring to mind those whose forgiveness you need to seek.
 - Let their faces come to your attention.
 - Determine what efforts you need to make to seek their forgiveness.

PRAY—*Be embraced by the friendship of the crucified God.*

Most merciful God,
I confess that I have sinned against you
in thought, word, and deed,
by what I have done, and by what I have left undone.
I have not loved you with my whole heart;
I have not loved my neighbor as myself.
I am truly sorry and I humbly repent.
For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, have mercy on me and forgive me;
that I may delight in your will,
and walk in your ways,
to the glory of your Name.
Amen.

"The design of our God and Savior in regard to humanity is a calling back from the fall and a return to familiar friendship with God from alienation brought about by disobedience."

-St. Basil of Caesarea (330-379 AD)

Video Transcript

Have you ever had a moment when you were clearly in the wrong? We quickly remember the stories of when others wronged us but do we ever explore those times, confess those times, when we've wronged others?

I can recall multiple times when I have hurt my wife. I raised my voice. I called her a name. I didn't tell the full truth. In those moments I can look at her face and see that I have hurt her deeply.

A few months ago, I was reflecting on the Gospel scene in which Jesus tells the children to come to him. The Lord invited me to locate myself in the story. I envisioned a small child walking before a crowd of men upset by Jesus' very acknowledgement of a child. In the ancient world, it was foolishness for this great teacher to waste his time with a kid. The Lord invited me to look at the child approaching Jesus. As I did, I saw myself. I was frightened and unsure of the maniacal mob surrounding me.

Then, as I sat on Jesus' lap, the face of the child shifted to that of my son and I was now in the crowd screaming about how he wasn't behaving. In my quest to be proper, I have often made my son feel unsure of himself. I felt convicted and I have sought my son's forgiveness for those moments when my social OCD gets the better of me. My wife and I have taught both of our children that when we apologize to them, they do not need to flippantly say, "It's okay." When we hurt one another, it is not okay. Instead, when they are able, they can declare to their misguided parents, "I forgive you." "It's okay" trivializes the hurt and shame. "I forgive you" is an act of the will offered as a healing balm to the wounds we create in others.

As we are invited to encounter the first words of Jesus on the cross, we are invited into a tragedy unfolding before our eyes. Against our sensibilities and perceptions of ourselves as righteous do-gooders, we recognize from the get-go that we are a culprit in this tragedy. With the words, "Father, forgive them," we first, and foremost, see God. God is exposed and abandoned *to* us and *for* us.

We are reminded that the death of God means we cannot come to Christ on our own. It is this cry of abandonment that challenges our perception of who God is. Is this *really* the Son of God? Is *this* the second person of the Trinity?

So, we try to protect God. We talk about Christ as victor over sin and puff out our theological chests. But we meet Jesus in a moment of weakness. There is no solution to this weakness. The death of God is fundamentally death *in* God. The Son asks the Father to forgive as we look away from the shameful of the moment. The life of the Trinity willingly chooses to experience pain and shame. The life of the Trinity has condescended to not only humanity but to a human hanging on a Roman cross.

If we're honest, we don't like that our story includes God dying. We quickly rush to the resurrection. But no parsing apart the story will change the fact that the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, fully God and fully human, is being executed before us. Herbert McCabe,

the late Catholic philosopher, wrote that “‘Father, forgive’ is the interior life of the Trinity.” We lean into this mystery of the Trinity, what the church has called the *Mysterium Paschale*, the “mystery of Easter,” on display before us. In the ugliness and pain of it all, *this* is God’s work on our behalf.

In this moment, unspeakable pain embraces unfathomable compassion. We find ourselves in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. The late theologian, Richard John Neuhaus paraphrases, these words of Jesus as, “Father, forgive them, for they have forgotten the way home. They have misplaced the real world.” You and I are coming home into the embrace of God.

As we step into the story of Good Friday, we recall that forgiveness is not mere sentimentality. We wear our crosses and declare ourselves forgiven. While it is true we must never divorce our forgiveness from the great price of the cross. Jesus is being executed. Something has gone wrong.

And we were part of it. We are not the victims in this story. Christological reflection does not begin with our victimhood. It begins with our victimization. We crucify God because his radical love offends our sensibilities. And God remains the forgiving victim in this story. As the hymn asks of us, “Were you there when they crucified my Lord?” Yes. We were there.

Who is guilty in this story? The story declares that God is and must be crucified. God becomes the sacrifice. The Son allows himself to be condemned to bear witness to the truth. Unfortunately, we are so obsessed with naming good from evil, straight from the garden, that we are blind to our complicity, our agency in the story. But this becomes the *felix culpa*—the “happy fault”—of Easter. “O happy fault,” the Easter hymn proclaims, “O necessary sin of Adam, which gained for us so great a redeemer!”

This is the God who desires our friendship. Arms spread wide before the worlds of Golgotha and eternity. This God forgives as you and I place our lies, half-truths and falsehoods on him. Look at him and hear him say your name. “Father forgive, Jason...he has lost the way home.”

This is the God who invites you and I to take up our crosses and participate in his divine life on display. Lay your offenses, your ideologies, your identities at the foot of the cross and discover your true self through our suffering Lord. Hear these words, dear church, by the power of the same spirit that raised Jesus from the grave, you are forgiven. May your forgiveness create a hospitality in your soul for a world in desperate need of being forgiven. The crucified God extends friendship with you so that you can extend his radical friendship to the world.

Father, forgive them...Father, forgive us. In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, amen.