

Confirmation Enrollment/Catechetical Sunday/ACWC 40th

[Sirach 27:30-28:7, Psalm 103: Romans 14:7-9; Matthew 18:21-35]

Today's readings offer an uncomfortable, but clear challenge to us: the challenge of forgiveness. The first reading from the Book of Sirach reminds us to release or turn over to the Lord our anger and desire for vengeance, for it is God's role, not ours, to punish those who have done evil. We are not to be vengeful; we are to forgive. "The vengeful will suffer the Lord's vengeance, for he remembers their sins in detail," Sirach writes. But as for us, we must forgive: "Forgive your neighbor's injustice; then when you pray, your own sins will be forgiven."

It is important to remember, however, that forgiving another does not mean absolving them of responsibility. To forgive another is to confirm that they have done wrong and are in need of forgiveness. Mercy does not cancel out justice or the need for conversion, but it does open up a path of charity that encourages and promotes conversion and justice. For the Christian in the world, we live in mercy and we long for justice, but we entrust final justice (final conversion) always to God. As long as we believe in the power and mercy of God, we always hope for this.

I'm reminded of what a friend said to me recently: "I'm not in the revenge business. That's not in my job description. That's in God's job description!"

Note that the reason given for why we should forgive, both in Sirach and in the Psalm, is that none of us are free of sin and guilt. We are all sinners, we have all done wrong. Yet, God forgives us, and so we must forgive others. The Psalm proclaims that God "has not dealt with us as our sins merit, nor requited us as our deeds deserve." God treats us with forgiveness, love and compassion, and we must do the same. Remember what we pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

Another person told me, "I don't have the time and energy to invest in hate and resentment. It takes too much out of me."

In some ways, forgiveness frees the one who forgives from carrying that burden. We can let it go and entrust the other to God, Who is better able to deal with them. The teaching on forgiveness is about being like God, Who is merciful. It is about recognizing something of ourselves in those who commit the greatest evils, for no one is free of sin. Finally, this teaching on forgiveness is about being able to live with the peace of love instead of fear and hate, which tears and destroys.

Today, throughout the country, is Catechetical Sunday. Some catechists tell me that it's the hardest job in the world, like being thrown into the lion's den every week as a parish steward. Do you know what a parish volunteer is? One person describes it as someone who couldn't get away fast enough from a swirling drain of need and got sucked down. Others describe it as a blessing, delving deeper and deeper into our relationship with Jesus and with the beauty that is the Catholic Church. The gift of teaching our children and preparing the future church that will one day replace us all.

One catechist said, "Like most catechists, I plan careful lessons, spend far too much time creating original props I can't find in any catalog, and watch each week as plans to teach the heck out of some religious concept get derailed by factors beyond my control. I've finally determined the only good lesson plan boils down to One Big Idea. If I just say one thing across the hour -- write it, say it, make them repeat it, sing it, dance it -- with any grace it may stick, and students will learn it by heart.

[5 PM Mass only] This weekend we enroll our young people preparing for Confirmation. You who are candidates, this is a challenging time in your lives. Too old to be cute little kids and too young to be considered adults. And – Spoiler Alert – Confirmation doesn't make you an "adult" in the Church! If it did, you would be able to vote, drive a car and join the military! Confirmation is your personal choice to be, to become and to live out the Catholic faith.

I challenge you this year to discover two important things: who you really are, and what God wants you to be when you grow up! Spoiler Alert Number Two: You are called to become a servant of the Lord. Our Second Reading says that when we live, we live for the Lord, and when we die, we die for the Lord. Find your place in the Church now! Today!

[11 AM Mass] Last, but not least, I address the members of the Active Christian Women's Club of our parish. Some of the original founding members in 1977 are still here and active in the ACWC. Their mission is threefold –

Spiritual: to grow personally in their relationship with the Lord, with Our Lady and with the Church. This is done through personal and group prayer, retreats and days of recollection;

Service: to be a parish steward in the countless ministries and services this parish provides; and

Social: to build up the Body of Christ by being Christ for each other when they gather for meetings, for fund-raisers and for social gatherings.

Since 1977, the ACWC has sacrificed hundreds of hours and thousands of dollars for the support of our parish ministries and services, as well as participated in the support of Archdiocesan, national and international Catholic charities and outreach. They have purchased items for our church and for the parish center. Thank you and God bless you, ladies, for being such a spiritual powerhouse in our parish and beyond!

Confirmation candidates, catechists, and the ACWC 40th anniversary: What a great day to celebrate the living out of our call to be “joyful, missionary disciples!” AMEN!