

St Pius-St Anthony 24th Sunday Ordinary Time Year A

Recall that last week Jesus gave the four step method of 'peacemaking' or reconciliation with an offending brother. I think today he is giving us a method to ensure we have peace within ourselves-to get anger or hostility of past grudges out of our own hearts and restoring peace within ourselves. Last week, Jesus emphasized peace with others and this week keeping peace within our own hearts. So immediately after the teaching last week about reconciling with others, we have this exchange today between Peter and Jesus. Peter makes what he thinks is a generous offer, "Lord must I forgive an offending brother as many as seven times?" What does Jesus say? Sure, seven is enough. **No**, He says 'try seventy times that', or "I will take your offer Peter and up it by 70". I can imagine (not the first time) the surprise of Peter hearing this; I bet he was counting on Jesus scaling it back to say 'oh three or four times should be enough'. But, Jesus wants supple life giving love to be in our hearts, he wants joy and exuberance to be in our hearts, like the fruits of the Holy spirit Gal 5:22 "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." He doesn't want a deadened hardness there or caustic bitterness or burning anger to be in our hearts, or the opposite of spirit's gifts Paul lists in that same Galatians 5, but verse 21 "hatred, rivalry, jealousy, fury, selfishness, dissensions, factions & envy" Jesus wants peace and love of God in our hearts, not thrills of chaos and disorder." So His call to forgive and forgive and forgive (to keep on forgiving... to moon & back), is about us keeping peace in our hearts and love of Him in all of our relationships. He doesn't want our hearts full of negative hurt emotions.

Because Jesus knows us from the inside, our human nature (the human heart). We like to hold on to hurts. What do they say, "we nurse grudges" "we stoke vengeance", "we kindle our envy". So, Jesus wants his disciples to not give hatred or sin any more energy than it already has. And that is what 'withholding forgiveness' does. When we don't move on past hurts, then we are stuck in them. We keep weighing ourselves down with burden of remembered hurts from others But what we have to ask ourselves, "Why do I keep carrying what my offender doesn't?" So often what we remember and hold dearly in our grudges, even if we could catch up with our offenders to question them about it, they probably don't even know what we are talking about-they don't remember it. It means nothing to them. So, why do I give it so much energy and so much time? What are people saying today, they use a phrase a lot that when we obsess jealously about someone (what they've done, what they've got or what they've hurtfully said to us), and that when we dwell so much on it, we are letting them live 'rent-free' in our heads or hearts. Don't let them 'squat' in our heads. Jesus, knows that about our human nature. To not forgive, means we hold on to dangerous emotions like poisonous anger, resentment which only threatens or sickens us more. Why do

we want to Hold on to all that stuff, just waiting for it to burn us again. Jesus wants us to process it and lay it to rest, Getting over it so we can get on with it

Or here's an example from world news that illustrates the danger of us holding on to resentments, instead of forgiving. Do you remember that tragedy back on August 4 in country of Lebanon. 2,750 tons of ammonium nitrate fertilizer exploded and sent a fiery shock wave across the whole residential downtown taking the lives of at least 200 residents (300K homeless). But I think 2,750 tons? Why would anyone store so much quantumly explosive material as all that ammonium nitrate in the heart of a city (yes it was by a port but obviously they weren't going to fertilize the sea and it wasn't about it moving in and out (it had been stored there at least 6 years waiting for a reason to explode). So, why house all that toxic stuff so close to so many families and daily street traffic? It is like me storing generator gasoline by the water heater in my kitchen storage closet. But don't we kinda do that when we hold past memories of grudges over hurts or daily nurse hostility in our hearts because of past slights. Can we see how we are too by keeping such poisons close to our sensitive heart and gentle souls? I don't want to hold dangerous emotions too close to my heart or near 'loved ones Jesus leads his disciples through this forgiveness work all the time in their service and ministry together. Once when James and John get slighted and rejected (probably mocked) by a Samaritan (enemy) town, they boldly ask Jesus for permission to take vengeance upon the town, and call down fire upon them. Jesus shuts them down quickly; says he 'rebuked them' Not just no.....(Luke 9:54-56). Also, he offered further encouragement to forgive and move on past injuries or insults when he taught them in Matt 10:14, if rejected, then "go outside that house or town and shake the dust from your feet." Don't take it so personally. Maintaining a forgiving attitude always reminds me of Jesus' discipleship instructions from a couple weeks ago, "Whoever would be my disciples must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me"(Matt 16:24). The Cross is felt (its heavy labor). Forgiveness is too. Sometimes people think that forgiveness is only for the weak, but I suggest that someone saying that should try it (the weaker, easier thing is always 'hitting back', mouthing an insult or resorting to worse attack). I think that image of carrying the cross fits 'forgiveness' so well. Think of following Jesus, as not only just the sheer heavy weight of carrying a cross of our or other peoples' burdens, but also the smaller, minute feel of jabbing splinters in our shoulders as we move along. That is the daily small forgivenesses we offer and the acceptance of sufferings tossed us by others in the give and take of every day. But such loving as Jesus loves us, is what we are called to do as His disciples. So a good question for us to pray about is 'What are we warehousing in our hearts, heads and souls?' Jesus wants us to hold forgiveness, not grudges. I'll close with a great little story I ran across this week about a child's lesson to be quick in letting go of the toxic danger of resentment through forgiveness. The little girl went to her mom about being upset and troubled. She said, "Mom, there is fight going on

inside me between two dogs, one is attacking, full of anger and envy over what a classmate said to me yesterday, and the other dog wants to go back to playing again and get on running and jumping in the yard. Which one is stronger, or wins?" And the mom said "Honey, It is the one you choose to feed that will overwhelm the other one."