

St Pius & St Anthony Homily 22nd Sunday Ordinary Year A1

“Walk it out, walk it out”. That’s a phrase our little league coach would say to us a lot. Now, when did he say that to us? Well, after any injury playing, but especially, when we had just stood in the batter’s box, right about to swing to hit a base or couple-base hit, and the pitcher got a little reckless throwing in close to us, a brush back pitch and the ball beaned us. The coach came running toward us, to stand us up and say, **‘Let’s walk it off, walk it off.’**” Maybe he was acting like a physical therapist or physical trainer, walking us along to really work it out, to rub out the pain and sting, but I know he was also guiding us toward the first base to keep our attention away from *vengeful thoughts* that could turn our baseball game into first, a fifty-yard dash to the pitcher’s mound to return the ball to him, or then an outright wrestling match. But the Coach was keeping us focused on the game, and the greater goal of the whole team accomplishing what we had come to do - play our best and maybe win!

Jesus, like the good coach, wants His disciples to stay focused on the mission of presenting and sharing the Good News, the kingdom of God, and so He commands his followers to be agents of divine love, 1) to bring peace to conflict, 2) to unite those who are divided or 3) to forgive those who have stood against us – we get so much farther down the road when we are traveling together in the same direction, than when we are tangled up in a fight. So, Jesus presents His followers today with a four-step process of working out forgiveness and of trying to hold things together by reaching out to reconcile ourselves with especially those who have directly offended us – to forgive them and preserve a bond of fellowship with them so we may witness God’s peace in our own relationships.

Of course, today’s lesson from Jesus on the necessity (the fact that ‘forgiving’ is necessary on the Christian life, is seen by Jesus’ **four** steps- He is saying, never give it up, keep at it, working & working to forgive). I grant full well though, that this is not easy. The command to forgive may be the most difficult teaching of Jesus. (*up there with his tough words on ‘Love your enemies’ – Matthews 5.43-44, ‘Not to be attached to or sweat over anything material – let go of stuff’ Matthew 6.25-26, or ‘Rejoice when persecuted’ Matthew 5.10-11, or ‘Wash one another’s feet’ John 13:15*)

So, yes, this forgiveness business is hard. And don’t some offenses hurt a lot more than others, and take longer for us to overcome, because we still feel the

sting (wound is still raw). But Jesus wants us (at least to want) to forgive always. He wants us to work at forgiving them. To 'walk it out' and get to forgiveness.

Again though, yes some cases can be hard. But we have to try. For example, I remember when I was a kid, my mother would often ask me or my brothers, whoever was lucky enough to be bored, or not be doing something when our neighbor Mr Allen would phone call our house, about needing his yard mowed). That day I got the job! So, I went on over, we used his mower and supplies (still used the hand clippers, like horizontal scissors, for trimming edges!) I took off mowing back yard first, (nearest his garage). After finishing the back yard, I started down his driveway (two rock tire paths with grass row in center), toward the front yard, and about half way down the drive, I felt a terrible pinch-pain in my thigh, and thought "Did I just hit a rock or something –that hurts bad!" I stopped, and bent over grabbing my leg-felt like I'd been stabbed. I thought that if a shooting rock ricocheted off the house wall or something, it easily could break window glass, so I guess I'm lucky. The mower still running, I started to raise back up, still gripping my leg, and I noticed my neighbor friend, standing at his 2nd floor window waving hands and laughing so hard – then I saw it- his BB rifle barrel. (No, I thought, you didn't just do that!) I couldn't believe it, he just shot me. It wasn't a rock, he shot me. And now, he is laughing. This is not funny! I, steaming mad, turned away and finished the mowing and went home, nursing the sore spot and nursing my hurt ego. It's odd that I didn't throw a rock back at him or go let air out of his bike tire (But, the wiser part of brain knew he still had the sniper's nest position and his gun in hand). So I just finished work and went home mad.

But that's sin- intentional injury- and laughter about it. HE offended me. What did I do? Well, I came to forgive him eventually. But it took time. We had to share a couple of Flavor-Ices together and several trips to the park bike-riding, before I got back to trusting him – Every time he came around and we played, I still felt a little pinch in my leg! It took some time to forgive. And I think that is why Jesus gives this four-step method of peace making or conflict resolution. Jesus like the good coach would tell us, to 'walk it out and work it out' to keep our focus on our own peace- not be consumed and spiral off into nursing the anger that arises from the pain. He wants us to get over the injury and move on -to forgive and go forward and walk again with that person. So, Jesus says first we should 'go to them and try to talk it out'. If that private encounter doesn't

succeed, then a second approach is to take along a mutually trusted friend or two, (not in any spirit of ganging up on them- but simply as a trusted third party to come along to keep the temperature lowered). If that doesn't work, then third time, Jesus says take it to the church, not in any sense of gossiping or airing out their dirty laundry, but only to ask prayer from the church (anonymously maybe) Asking the church to pray for resolution, and a softening of hearts of everyone concerned. And if that doesn't work, Jesus finally says, 'Treat them as you would a gentile or tax collector'. Now I have to add quickly that Jesus does not mean by this that we are justified in returning hurt to them at that point or even just writing them off. No, it only means that they are now similar to someone we have not known before (*recall Jesus said he precisely came to call sick, not the well-'call Gentile (outsiders) and tax collectors'-Matt 9:13*), so we have to go back the beginning, & completely reset and start over. We have to re-approach them on a higher level, with an entirely new and creative approach. Go back to the drawing board and come at forgiveness again, praying for a breakthrough and a meeting of hearts that God alone may be able to accomplish. But we have to ***keep wanting*** to make peace, to keep our heart open to them and wish them the best, with us or without us in their lives for a while. But the relationship needs some time for divine restoration. But we remain ready, and open to such opportunities to reconnect and reconcile with them Again, this forgiveness work is not easy, but as Jesus told us in Matthew 19:26 "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." So, we never give up on forgiveness. Maybe we step back a moment and pray for the grace to reapproach on new ground. But we try, to make peace & reconcile (work it out, to walk it out, again with our brother/sister).